

THE HOLINESS OF GOD  
IN JOHN CALVIN AND RUDOLF OTTO

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William M. Elliott, Jr., A.B., B.D., D.D.

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To  
MY WIFE

Eternal Light! eternal Light!  
How pure the soul must be,  
When, placed within Thy searching sight,  
It shrinks not, but, with calm delight,  
Can live, and look on Thee!

The spirits that surround Thy throne  
May bear the burning bliss;  
But that is surely theirs alone,  
Since they have never, never known  
A fallen world like this.

O how shall I, whose native sphere  
Is dark, whose mind is dim,  
Before the Ineffable appear,  
And on my naked spirit bear  
The uncreated beam?

There is a way for man to rise  
To that sublime abode:  
An offering and a sacrifice,  
A Holy Spirit's energies,  
An Advocate with God.

These, these prepare us for the sight  
Of holiness above:  
The sons of ignorance and night  
May dwell in the eternal Light,  
Through the eternal Love!

- Thomas Binney, 1798-1874

## PREFACE

Our day needs a fresh emphasis on the holiness of God. Such an emphasis would serve to correct many of the ills of our contemporary religious thought and life. For one thing, it would deliver us of much of the shabbiness and softness which has characterized a good deal of our present-day thought of God. Modern religion is suffering from an impoverished conception of God. Men have laid stress on His more tender qualities, but have frequently lost sight of His transcendent, awe-inspiring majesty. They have proclaimed a divine Fatherhood which is effeminate and throneless. They have remembered that God is love, but have overlooked the fact that God's love is always holy love. As one clergyman has put it,<sup>1</sup> "Our God is not Love, but a flabby good nature; nor is He holy, but weakly indulgent, smuggling us somehow through."

One can detect the need for such an emphasis on God's holiness in the irreverence and breezy familiarity which pervades the worship of many of our churches and some of our religious speech. A striking example of this sort of thing was reported to me recently in a con-

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<sup>1</sup> A. J. Gossip, *From The Edge Of The Crowd*, p. 77



versation. The guest speaker at a P.S.A. meeting of men in a Scottish church said, "What we want is a God Who is a pal." There is much of this sort of thing in the religious speech and worship of American Protestantism. A fresh vision of divine holiness which awes and silences the heart would help to correct such unworthy attitudes. Dr. Mozley is right when he says:<sup>1</sup> "The rather jaunty attitude which is sometimes adopted towards God in the religious speech of today is not unconnected with a loss of the sense of God's holiness."

And may we not trace to the same source our light views of sin and much of the spiritual indifference and moral drift which mark our generation?

Such considerations as these have led me to undertake the study which has resulted in the writing of this dissertation. My first thought was to present a general discussion on the doctrine of holiness, but I finally settled on which seemed a less pretentious and more interesting course, namely, a comparative study of the views of divine holiness held and expounded by two great theologians, John Calvin and Professor Rudolf Otto.

I might state ~~very~~ briefly why these two men were selected for this study. While much has been written on

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<sup>1</sup> The Doctrine of God, p. 69

the doctrinal views of John Calvin, there has been, so far as I know, no comprehensive study made of his doctrine of God's holiness. The underlying and guiding principle of all of Calvin's thinking was his doctrine of God. "The first word in Calvinism is God."<sup>1</sup> All of his views were coloured by his conception of the character of God. As Dr. Hunter has so well expressed it:<sup>2</sup> "Calvin himself was, if not a God-intoxicated, at least a God-possessed man. His whole mind, heart and life was vitalised, governed and suffused by his thought of God. Of no man could it be more truly said that he set God ever before him." This is certainly true, and because it is, the writings of Calvin offer an inviting field for a study of holiness.

The choice of Calvin is probably due in some measure also to the so-called "revival of Calvinism" in some of the new theological movements, notably that of the Barthian school.

Another reason I shall mention is a more personal one. Knowing of the profound and indelible influence which John Calvin has had on the theological thought

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<sup>1</sup> James Orr, Article in Hastings Ency. of Religion and Ethics, p. 148

<sup>2</sup> The Teachings of Calvin, p. 45

of the English speaking world, I have desired a more intimate acquaintance with the man, his writings and his views, which a detailed study provides.

Anyone who is acquainted with the writings of the late Professor Rudolf Otto of Marburg, Germany, will recognize that my selection of him is both natural and necessary. For, as one writer has put it,<sup>1</sup> "No one can fitly write of holiness and ignore the work of Professor Rudolf Otto."

As we shall see more fully in the introductory section which follows this preface, there are two great general aspects in the idea of holiness. We may speak of them as the ethical aspect, and the divine or sacred aspect. To most minds the word "holiness" stands for God's moral perfection or purity. This is a quite legitimate use of the word, but it also includes this other element of sacredness, and it is this quality which has been brought to the fore by Prof. Otto in his striking book, Das Heilige. This book was first published in 1917. It has enjoyed a large circulation and aroused widespread comment. Das Heilige has been translated into English by Mr. J. H. Harvey under the title The Idea Of The Holy.

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<sup>1</sup> A. D. Martin, The Holiness of Jesus, p. 7

Professor Otto's book is by all odds one of the most fascinating and thought-provoking books ever (to be) published in the field of religion. Prof. R. Birch Hoyle ranks it among the ten greatest theological books of the last half century,<sup>1</sup> and Dr. Kenneth Edwards declares in his Kerr lectures that "Dr. Rudolf Otto's book entitled Das Heilige is probably at once the most significant and the most provocative work on religion which has appeared in our generation."<sup>2</sup> Prof. Otto's contribution to the idea of holiness is unique and significant, and his The Idea of the Holy is undoubtedly the best treatise available on the divine or sacred element in holiness.

This study has been a most interesting one, and has proved to be of inestimable value to the writer. He has had the opportunity not only of knowing what two great thinkers have thought about God, but better still what two religious geniuses have experienced of God, for Calvin and Otto have in their writings laid bare their own souls.

I cannot bring this preface to a close without recording my sincere thanks for the wise counsel and valuable criticisms and suggestions given me by my supervisor, the late Professor Hugh R. Mackintosh, D.Phil.,<sup>2.2.1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Article, British Weekly, November 12, 1936, p. 131  
<sup>2</sup> Religious Experience, Its Nature and Truth, p. 56

of New College, Edinburgh; to the Rev. A. Mitchell Hunter, D. Litt., New College Librarian, for his generous assistance in the gathering together of materials; and to my esteemed friend, the Rev. J. H. Marion, Jr., who read the manuscript.

William M. Elliott, Jr.

Atlanta, Georgia

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## INTRODUCTION

The idea of holiness has had a long and rather complicated history, and during its long history has experienced considerable development and modification. In Dr. Glover's words, "The term 'holy', if we could trace it through all the successive suggestions, would be a tell-tale word, as it moved from the physical and all but irrational onward through the moral to the spiritual."<sup>1</sup>

The idea of holiness belongs to the ancient stock of common Semitic conceptions. Of the Hebrew terms which convey the idea the most prominent is  $\text{קֹדֶשׁ}$  ( $\text{קֹדֶשֶׁת}$ , abstract noun, 'holiness', and  $\text{קֹדֶשׁ}$  adj., 'holy'). The original meaning of this Hebrew term is by no means indisputably clear. As Oehler has pointed out,<sup>2</sup> "Etymologically, the root-meaning of  $\text{קֹדֶשׁ}$  cannot be exactly defined." The older view was that the root-meaning is that of 'clear' or 'brilliant'. Dillman defends this view. In his Alttestamentliche Theologie he suggests that the word is from a root found in Arabic and Ethiopic, kada, 'to be pure, clear' (Assyrian kuddushu, 'brilliant'; cf. Hebrew hadhash, 'new, shining'). But Skinner<sup>3</sup> says that this is a highly speculative construction, and Whitehouse contends<sup>4</sup> that "it would be precarious to build upon the infrequent use in Assyrian of derived forms, and in Arabic of what may

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Mackintosh, *The Christian Apprehension of God*, p. 154

<sup>2</sup> *Old Testament Theology*, p. 105

<sup>3</sup> *Hastings' Dict. of the Bible*, Vol. II, p. 395

<sup>4</sup> *Ency. of Rel. and Ethics*, Vol. VI, p. 751



## INTRODUCTION

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<sup>3</sup> *Hastings Dict. of the Bible*, Vol. II, p. 395

<sup>4</sup> *Ency. of Rel. and Ethics*, Vol. VI, p. 751



be a derived meaning."

The majority of scholars now follow Baudissin, who finds the fundamental idea in 'separation'. Baudissin says:<sup>1</sup> "A comparison with  $\text{שָׁרָה}$  makes it natural to conjecture that  $\text{שָׁדָךְ}$  meant from the first 'to be separated' - 'to be pure' - i.e., that  $\text{שָׁדָךְ}$  was from the beginning synonymous with  $\text{שָׁרָה}$ ; cp.  $\text{רָצָה}$ , 'pure', from  $\text{רָצַח}$ , 'to cut' or 'cut out'." Dr. G. A. Smith says that Baudissin's view "suits many passages: the holiness of the Kēdēsīm and the Kēdēsōth, who were certainly found in Israel very early, can have consisted only in their separation."<sup>2</sup>

If Baudissin is correct, and the original meaning is that of 'separation', then the term 'holy' would seem to have a purely negative connotation. And R. Kittel<sup>3</sup> suggests that for this reason the older view as defended by Dillmann has a real advantage over Baudissin's theory. Dillmann's theory does give a positive as against a negative sense which applies easily to deity and to divine things. Yet it is to be remembered, says Kittel, that holiness in the Old Testament is not necessarily conjoined with the idea of 'brilliance'.

We can see that while there has been considerable speculation regarding the original meaning of 'kadosh'

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<sup>1</sup> Studien zur semit. Religionsgesch. 2, 20

<sup>2</sup> Encyclopaedia Biblica, Vol. I, p. 837

<sup>3</sup> New Schaff-Herzog Ency. of Rel. Knowledge, Vol. V, p. 316

it has led to nothing certain, and we can conclude with Dr. Skinner:<sup>1</sup> "The original idea conveyed by the words is altogether uncertain, neither etymology nor the analogy of the cognate dialects having as yet thrown much light on the subject." And, if we cannot arrive at the original sense of the word through etymology, neither can we get at it by any mere analysis of the modern use of the word, for, as Robertson Smith has pointed out,<sup>2</sup> "The primitive conception of holiness, to which the modern variations of the idea must be traced back, belonged to a habit of thought with which we have lost touch, and we cannot hope to understand it by the aid of logical discussion." A much more satisfactory method is to observe the various ways in which the terms 'holy' and 'holiness' are employed in early religion.

It seems clear that the word 'holy' had originally a physical sense, and was closely akin to that which is taboo. Holiness was conceived of as a quasi-physical quality. (See Leviticus 11:44ff., 20:26.; Ezekiel 43:7-9.) In the words of Whitehouse,<sup>3</sup> "Holiness in primitive religion, like much else, is concrete and quasi-physical, and, moreover, is bound up with magical elements of tabu." He also states:<sup>4</sup> "It seems clear that the idea of taboo attaching to objects and persons was very similar to that

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<sup>1</sup> Hastings Dict. of the Bible, Vol. II, p. 395

<sup>2</sup> Religion of the Semites, p. 91

<sup>3</sup> Ency. of Religion and Ethics, Vol. VI, p. 758

<sup>4</sup> Commentary on Isaiah, Vol. I, p. 123

which originally belonged to the Hebrew kōdesh (holiness) and its collaterals." And A. B. Davidson says:<sup>1</sup> "The word 'to be holy' and the adjective 'holy' had originally, like all such words, a physical sense, now completely lost, not only in Hebrew but in all the other Shemitic languages."

In ancient Semitic heathenism and even in the earlier narratives of the Old Testament 'holiness' is represented as a quality transmissible by physical contact - a sort of physical contagion or infection (see Ex. 29:37; 30:29; Lev. 6:27; Ezek. 44:19; 46:20). Robertson Smith quotes the following passage from Shortland's Southern Districts of New Zealand, p. 293: "A slave or other person not sacred would not enter a 'wahi tapu', or sacred place, without having first stripped off his clothes; for the clothes, having become sacred the instant they entered the precincts of the 'wahi tapu', would ever after be useless to him in the ordinary business of his life." Dr. Smith also tells us that at Mecca, in the times of heathenism, any man who made the sacred circuit of the Caaba had to do so naked, or in clothes specially borrowed for the purpose from one of the Homs, or religious community of a sacred city. It sometimes happened that a man would make the circuit in his own clothes, but in that case he could neither wear them again nor sell them, but had to leave them at the gate of the sanctuary.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Old Testament Theology, p. 144

<sup>2</sup> See, Religion of the Semites, pp. 450-451

The doctrine of the contagiousness of holiness occupies a prominent place in the early literature of the Old Testament. The flesh used in the sin offering sanctifies all that it touches, and any garment sprinkled with blood must be washed in the holy place lest it sanctify. For the same reason the earthen vessels used in cooking are to be broken, and the brazen pots are to be rinsed and scoured until the last vestige of holiness is removed, (See Lev. 6:24-30). In Ezēkiel we find that special kitchens were provided where the priests cook the most holy things, and also special chambers where they are to eat them, lest bringing them into the outer court they sanctify the people so that they would become the property of the sanctuary, or at least subject to the same obligations of the priests (see Ezek. 46:24). "When Elijah casts his mantle over Elisha, the latter has to follow until Elijah releases him; the worshippers of Baal, whose ordinary dress might 'profane' the house, are provided with special vestments from the stores of the house of Baal; otherwise, when they came outside, their ordinary dress would make whatever it touched 'holy to Baal', and unavailable to the former owners. The priest on the great Day of Atonement is to take off the holy linen garments and leave them in the holy place, and to wash his

flesh in water, lest any of the contagion of holiness should cling to him."<sup>1</sup>

One of the clearest examples of this idea of physical contagion in the Old Testament is that of the Ark. At an early period the Ark is a nomadic shrine, identified with the presence of Yahweh in the midst of Israel, and therefore holy. If one comes into physical contact with it the most dire consequences follow. There are therefore, strict commands that it not be touched. Uzzah (I Chron. 13:9-10) dies trying to save it from a fall when the oxen stumble as it is being brought to David's city. It is the source of all sorts of calamities when in the cities of the Philistines, and when it is returned to Israel it brings pestilence to the men of Beth-Shemesh who were rash enough to look inside it (I Sam. 6:19).

Concerning this idea of physical contagion in primitive religion Wheeler Robinson says:<sup>2</sup> "The mysterious and perilous powers which the gods possess check every rash and ill-advised attempt to approach them.... Sacred objects can be touched only under the strictest precautions; they are as dangerous to the uninitiated as the switchboard of an electrical power-house might be to a child. The various abstinences, ablutions, wearing of orna-

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<sup>1</sup> G. A. Smith, Ency. Biblica, p. 838

<sup>2</sup> The Religious Idea of the Old Testament, p. 131



ments or special dress, found amongst Hebrews as amongst other peoples in their approach to the deity, spring from the assumption that the divine holiness makes approach unsafe, without the insulation they afford."

If we take the fundamental idea of holiness to be that of separation, then things and persons were called 'holy' because they were separated or lying apart. But it is important to note that it is not mere separation which makes a thing or a person holy - it is separation unto Jehovah. As A. B. Davidson has pointed out,<sup>1</sup> "the term is never used in the general sense of separate or lying apart; it always signifies separated for deity, belonging to the sphere of deity." Things and persons were called 'holy' because they had been separated as especially devoted to the use or enjoyment of deity. Thus at a very early period, the word must have acquired its own special meaning, its application being restricted to deity and what had to do with deity.

If the term 'holy' was applied to all that had been set apart for some sacred or religious purpose, it did not therefore necessarily denote any quality or characteristic. It designated rather a relation, and as such came to have a very wide application. In ancient Israel all

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<sup>1</sup> Old Testament Theology, p. 152

connected with Jehovah was holy, either permanently or during the time of connection. He dwelt in a holy heaven (Ps. 20:6), sat on an holy throne (Ps. 47:8), and was surrounded by holy attendants (Ps. 89:7). His Spirit was holy (Ps. 51:11; Isa. 63:10f), His name was holy (Lev. 20:3), His arm was holy (Ps. 98:1), and His way was holy (Isa. 35:8). The Temple was holy (Ps. 11:4) and the city of the Temple (Isa. 52:1; Neh. 11:1). Everything in connection with the Temple was holy, its utensils and furnishings (I Kgs. 8:4), the anointing oil (Ex. 30:25), the altars of incense and burnt-offering (Ex. 30:27f), the flesh of the sacrifices (Lev. 23:20; Hag. 2:12), the incense (Ex. 30:36), the table (Ex. 30:27), the shew-bread (I Sam. 21:6), the candlestick (Ex. 30:27), the priestly clothing (Ex. 28:2,4). Special days and seasons were holy (Lev. 23-25). The ark was holy (II Chron. 35:3). The ground adjacent to the burning bush was holy (Ex. 3:5) because hallowed by the presence of God in the bush (cf. Josh. 5:15; Ezek. 48:13-15; Zech. 2:12). Even the temporary camp in time of war is consecrated by the presence of the God of the armies of Israel (Deut. 23:14).

Persons were called 'holy' who had a special relation to God. The priests (see Lev. 21 & 22), the Levites (Num. 3:17f), the Nazarites (Num. 6:5), soldiers in a military campaign (I Sam. 21:5-6), and also the prophets

(Jer. 1:5). When the lady of Shunem spoke of Elisha as 'an holy man of God' (II Kgs. 4:9) she was not thinking of any quality of saintliness she saw in his character. She was referring to his vocation as a speaker for God. He is holy simply because he stands in a near relation to Jehovah.

The whole nation of Israel was called a 'holy nation' or a 'holy people' simply because the Israelites were closely related to God and His divine purposes for the world. Israel was separated from other nations in order that she might be the special agent of His redemptive plan. "And ye shall be holy unto me: for I the Lord am holy, and have severed you from other people, that ye should be mine" (See Lev. 20:26, Exodus 19:6; Lev. 22:32; Deut. 7:6).

It is also to be observed that there were degrees or gradations of holiness, the degree of holiness depending upon the degree of proximity to deity. On this point A. B. Davidson says:<sup>1</sup> "In that which was holy there might be gradations; the outer part of the temple was holy, the inner most holy. All flesh-offerings were holy, but the sin-offering was most holy....The word 'holy' describes the primary relation of belonging to Jehovah; and things

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<sup>1</sup> Old Testament Theology, p. 153



were 'most holy' which belonged exclusively or in some special way to Him. The sin-offering, for example, was partaken of exclusively by the priests, His immediate servants. It was wholly given over to Jehovah; while the peace-offerings were in large part given back to the laity, to be used by the people in their sacrificial feasts."

In the Old Testament Jehovah is the fountain, the source of all holiness in things and persons. Everything depends upon their relation to Him. Nothing is holy because of any quality inherent within itself. (This truth is carried to its highest spiritual significance in St. Paul's doctrine of the righteousness which is imputed to men - the righteousness which is by faith.) Dr. George A. Smith has said, regarding this doctrine in the Old Testament:<sup>1</sup> "Logically and theologically God's holiness is the source of all others: he is holy himself and therefore what he takes for his must be holy too." The clause, "for I, Yahweh, am holy," runs like a refrain throughout the Levitical Law. It is the basis of everything.

In all the cases which we have cited above, holiness has a ceremonial or aesthetic meaning. Things, days, seasons, places, persons, a nation - all these are spoken of as 'holy' only because they had been called to "share in God's dignity" and were therefore withdrawn from all

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<sup>1</sup> Ency. Biblica, p. 841

'profane' or 'common' use. (In Hebrew the contrasted term to kōdesh is hōl (חל). It means simply that which is 'open to common use', not subject to the restrictions involved in holiness.) Now there was nothing at all disparaging about the word 'common' or 'profane'. It was simply the regular appellation applied to that which was intended for ordinary use in contradistinction to that which was set apart for sacred or religious use. Thus in I Samuel 21:4 Abimelech the priest says to David: "There is no common bread under my hand, but there is holy bread." (cf. Ezek. 22:26; 44:23; 48:13-15.)

Holiness at this physical stage then, when applied either to persons or things, did not express any moral quality. As Whitehouse has observed:<sup>1</sup> "The conception of holiness when traced to its historic origins among Semitic peoples is stripped of all the ethical qualities with which our Christian modern consciousness has invested it. The ethical elements which have become absorbed into its content entered at a much later stage in the evolution of ideas which became attached to the term." But, on the other hand, to say that originally the term 'holy' did not express any moral quality does not mean that it was unethical, but that it was only "ethically neutral,"

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<sup>1</sup> Ency. of Religion and Ethics, Vol. VI, p. 751

as Pace has expressed it.<sup>1</sup> Instead of calling holiness at this earlier stage unethical, Prof. Robertson Smith says<sup>2</sup> that we should speak of it as 'pre-ethical': "It is misleading," he says, "to stamp religion at the physical stage as necessarily unethical. Early ideas of the Sacred and Holy had not that ethical or moral value which the Hebrew prophets gave them; they were pre-ethical. They did not necessarily exclude an ~~un~~ethical meaning, but they were undifferentiated, being interwoven with what was non- and anti-ethical. And as the stress was not laid upon their ethical significance, they not only included but even emphasized (as in the Kedesoth) what proved to be immoral and anti-social."

Holiness as applied to things certainly could not have expressed any moral quality, and the fact that the Hierodouloi, or sacred prostitutes, of the Canaanite religion were called 'holy women' clearly shows that the adjective 'holy' was applied to persons in a sense that was far from ethical. To quote Robertson Smith again:<sup>3</sup> "While it is not easy to fix the exact idea of holiness in ancient Semitic religion, it is quite certain that it has nothing to do with morality and purity of life. Holy

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<sup>1</sup> Idea of God in Israel, p. 174

<sup>2</sup> Religion of the Semites, p. 679

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp. 140, 141

persons were such, not in virtue of their character, but in virtue of their race, function, or mere material consecration; and at the Canaanite shrines the name of 'holy' was specially appropriated to a class of degraded wretches, devoted to the most shameful practices of a corrupt religion, whose life, apart from its connection with the sanctuary, would have been disgraceful even from the standpoint of heathenism."

The fact that 'holy' has been used of persons without implying any moral quality is emphasized by A. D. Martin. He says:<sup>1</sup> "The Hebrew Law refers distinctly to holy men and holy women, but our English versions translate the Hebrew terms sodomite and harlot (Deut. 23:17), thereby somewhat misleading their readers. The persons referred to were male and female prostitutes engaged at places of worship. They were definitely called holy men and holy women, because they plied their vile trade in temples and in honour of deities. The idea, like most primitive ideas has survived to comparatively modern times in the East. Thus Edward Lane (Manners and Customs of Modern Egyptians, Chap. x) last century reported the existence of some naked lunatics in the streets of Cairo, from contact with whom even women did not shrink, and who were

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<sup>1</sup> The Holiness of Jesus, p. 18

positively revered because they were holy men, their mental and moral disorders being regarded as evidence that their souls had been caught up into heaven for communion with God, whilst their grosser part was left behind. More recently, Ives Curtiss found holy men in Syria who were either naked or wearing filthy garments, clearly insane persons, but greatly venerated by Moslems. Most of these people were immoral, although their immorality was not regarded as definitely a part of religious worship. Moral or immoral, they were holy because they bore a special relation to God.....The holiness in all these instances lies in a special contact with deity."

Anthropologists have pointed out that holiness and pollution, which in our modern religious thought are diametrically opposed, are not differentiated in the primitive mind. On this point Sir J. G. Frazer says:<sup>1</sup> "In primitive society the rules of ceremonial purity observed by divine kings, chiefs, and priests agree in many respects with the rules observed by homicides, mourners, women in childbed, girls at puberty, hunters and fishermen, and so on. To us these various classes of persons appear to differ totally in character and condition; some of them we call holy, others we might pronounce unclean and polluted.

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<sup>1</sup> The Golden Bough (3rd ed.) "Taboo and the Perils of the soul", p. 224.

But the savage makes no such moral distinction between them; the conceptions of holiness and pollution are not yet differentiated in his mind."

We must conclude therefore, that the word 'holy' in its origin and even in its more developed form in early Hebrew history was by no means synonymous with 'righteous.' The idea of holiness became more and more ethical and less and less physical and ceremonial as the Hebrews progressed in their conception of the character of God. But we shall come to deal with this later.

#### The term 'holy' as applied to God

When the average person speaks of God as 'holy' he probably has in mind His moral perfection. That however, was not the original meaning of 'holy' as applied to deity. In primitive religion it expresses not any single attribute of deity, but is rather a general term expressing Godhead. It is a comprehensive designation of deity. In primitive religion the term could hardly connote ethical purity for the deities to whom it was applied by the heathen Semites were not only immoral from our Christian point of view, but were not even regarded as moral by their own worshippers. Originally then, holiness did not express any special attribute of the divine nature, but rather the general notion of Godhead, as opposed to the



human. 'Holy' was somewhat synonymous with 'divine'. Robertson Smith says on this point:<sup>1</sup> "Holiness, in fact, is the most comprehensive predicate of the Godhead, equally familiar to the Hebrews and their heathen neighbours. The 'holy gods' is a standing designation of the Phoenician deities, as we learn from the monument of Eshmunazar; and so the word in its original use cannot have conveyed any idea peculiar to the religion of Jehovah. Its force lay in its very vagueness, for it included every distinctive character of Godhead, and every advance in the true knowledge of God made its significance more profound; thus the doctrine of Jehovah's holiness is simply the doctrine of His true Godhead."

Originally kadosh signified that mysterious, indefinable fear-inspiring quality that differentiates divinity from humanity. Baudissin, in fact, justly maintains that the Hebrews said 'holy' where we say 'divine' or 'heavenly'. When predicated of Jehovah, holiness denoted not so much one of His peculiar attributes, as the totality of His divine character. Instead of expressing any one side of the divine nature, 'holy' is a general and comprehensive term which includes all the attributes which

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<sup>1</sup> The Prophets of Israel, pp. 224,225

are assigned to the Godhead. As W. M. Clarke puts it:<sup>1</sup>  
 "There is no defining of holiness, but the word assigns to God all that makes His presence glorious in itself and searching to men."

In its early stages then, the holiness of God was a negative rather than a positive conception. The original meaning of the word kadosh, i.e., separateness, is dominant. God is 'holy' in that He is separated from all else. He stands alone, supreme, and apart from all that is human and mundane, and is therefore 'taboo,' unapproachable. "God, so far as He is holy, is separated in everything which makes Him God from man in his fugitive and creaturely existence."<sup>2</sup>

It is significant that 'holy' or 'holiness' was one of the names which the Hebrews gave their God. The simple word kadosh was given the status of a proper name. "To whom then will ye liken me, saith Kadosh?" (Isaiah 40:25). In the minds of the early Hebrews then, 'holy' is more than an adjective describing God; 'holy' is His name. "'Holy', therefore, was not primarily an epithet for 'god' or 'the gods'; it expressed the idea of God or the gods in itself. No other epithet given to Jehovah is ever used in the same way. For example, Jehovah is righteous; but

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<sup>1</sup> The Christian Doctrine of God, p. 15

<sup>2</sup> A. C. Welch, The Religion of Israel, p. 145



'the righteous one', in the absolute or abstract sense, is a term never applied to Him -- nor 'the gracious', and the like. It seems clear, therefore that Kadosh is not a word that expresses any attribute of deity, but deity itself."<sup>1</sup> Holiness then must not be thought of as a mere attribute of Jehovah. It is rather a designation of His essential being, a term which describes Him as God. For example, in Hosea 11:9 we have these words: "I am God, and not a man; I am the Holy One in the midst of thee." Here the terms "God" and "Holy One" may be regarded as synonymous. In Amos 4:2 we read, "Jehovah God hath sworn by His holiness," and in Amos 6:8, "Jehovah God hath sworn by Himself." These two phrases have virtually the same meaning. (cf. Gen. 22:16; Ex. 32:13; Jer. 22:5; 49:13; Isa. 45:23.) The Hebrews could think of no higher name for God than 'holy'.

Holiness as applied to God did not remain of course, a purely abstract term. It was the principal designation of Godhead, but Godhead is no mere abstraction. To quote from A. B. Davidson:<sup>2</sup> "The word 'holy' while expressing 'Godhead' did not express this idea altogether abstractly, but always seized, on each occasion when used, upon some attribute, or connoted some attribute which betokened

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<sup>1</sup> A. B. Davidson, Theology of the Old Testament, p. 151

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 147, 148

deity, such as majesty, or purity, or glory, and the like."

When the Old Testament writers referred to God as 'holy' they had in mind one or more characteristics of Jehovah, like transcendent majesty, glory, greatness, power or righteousness. As man came more and more to understand the character of God the conception of holiness was given a richer content. The idea of holiness as applied to Jehovah proceeds step by step with the progressive revelation or unveiling of the character of Jehovah. "As we find in Hebrew history, reflected in its literature, an evolution in the conception of the character and requirements of Yahweh, so a progress is clearly apparent in the meaning attached to the words 'holy' and 'holiness'."<sup>1</sup> An expanding revelation of God issues in an expanding idea of divine holiness. And the title 'holy' opened the way for each Old Testament writer to attach to it that quality of the divine nature which seemed to him to be of the greatest significance.

The fact that 'holiness' did not remain a purely abstract term signifying Godhead, but that it came to possess real content, and stand for certain definite characteristics of deity, is shown by the fact that Yahweh in the early literature of the Old Testament is represented as being unlike the 'holy gods' of the surrounding nations.

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<sup>1</sup> Whitehouse, Commentary on Isaiah, p. 123

"Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods? who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders" (Ex. 15:11)? "There is none holy as the Lord: for there is none beside thee: neither is there any rock like our God" (I Sam. 2:2). "To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One" (Isa. 40:25). The writers of the Old Testament so interpreted the holiness of God as to fix a great gulf between Him and the nature gods of the heathen nations. Jehovah is an incomparable God. He is separate not only from His creatures, but also from all the imaginary gods of other nations. And this separateness and superiority was due to certain qualities in Jehovah which the heathen gods and idols did not possess. On this point Robertson Smith says:<sup>1</sup> "Thus the Godhead of Jehovah ~~was~~ taught by the prophets meant something quite different from the godhead or holiness attributed to idols or to heathen deities. There was no longer any meaning in applying the same terms to both: Jehovah alone was holy, or, what is practically the same thing, He alone was God in the true sense of these words."

### Ethical Holiness

As soon as Jehovah came to be conceived of as a righteous Being, kadosh came to have an ethical content. This was not because the term in itself meant 'pure' or 'righteous', but because it was applied to a Deity to Whom that quality was attributed.

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<sup>1</sup> The Prophets of Israel, p. 225

We must keep in mind however, that this moral element in holiness was at first largely or altogether absent. In origin the idea is "ethically neutral." Jehovah was ethically holy always, but men did not perceive this at first. The revelation they received was progressive. But this ethical quality in holiness at first so slight was to undergo a remarkable development. Originally the term ~~holiness~~ 'holy' seems to have denoted that which belongs to God, or is divine, as opposed to that which is human. But before the Old Testament had borne its whole message holiness had come to denote that which is morally pure in contrast to evil of every kind. As W. M. Clarke has expressed it:<sup>1</sup> "The glory of the Old Testament is the strong revealing of the ethical idea of the divine holiness. 'The Lord our God is holy' (Ps. xcix.9) may indeed have meant at first, 'Our God is apart from us, and we must stand in awe before him'; but it came to mean, 'Our God is infinitely better than we, in the very character that we know we ought to bear.'" As men came to appreciate more fully the character of God they saw that the thing which really was primarily responsible for their separation from Him was His moral perfection. "'Holiness' was ultimately destined to be transformed into an inward quality or attribute, a real separateness not from more

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<sup>1</sup> The Christian Doctrine of God, p. 96

bodily uncleanness but from spiritual and moral defilement; aloofness not from idolatrous pollutions of Egypt, but from sin."<sup>1</sup>

This development of the moral quality of holiness may be said to have begun comparatively early. Ottley declares<sup>2</sup> that there are at least some considerations in favour of the view that the process by which the notion of holiness was, so to speak, moralized began at the period of the Exodus. Bertrand Brasnett suggests<sup>3</sup> that "It is possible enough that amongst the most primitive peoples there was an ethical element in the idea of holiness; at the least it was considered fitting and proper that men should maintain right relations towards that which was holy, and the fitting and the proper were ethical ideas." And A. D. Martin says<sup>4</sup> that the deliverance of the Israelites at the Red Sea revealed to them that God was on the side of righteousness - that He intervened in behalf of righteousness. "God was revealed in the doing of something tremendous indeed, something overwhelming, and it was in confutation of unrighteousness. Never again could those who received this revelation think of him merely as the animists did. Never again could he be only the numen. He was good.

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<sup>1</sup> Ottley, Aspects of the Old Testament, p. 74

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 73

<sup>3</sup> God the Worshipful,

<sup>4</sup> The Holiness of Jesus, pp. 27-29



And therefore, because he was good, all the primitive technique and apparatus of worship had to be valued afresh. That which, because of its relation to him was holy had to be regarded likewise as good, and the ethicization of Holiness began." (Last italics mine).

The ethical element was never wholly absent in the Law of Holiness (Lev. 17-26). It is true that in this code no distinction is made between ceremonial and ethical holiness. They are inextricably blended. Nevertheless, where holiness is an ideal to be realized in conduct, the term is certainly charged with ethical meaning. In the Holiness Code the sins which Yahweh condemns are moral in character. In Leviticus 18 a long list of immoral practices are given which Yahweh in His holiness denounces and strictly forbids his people indulging in them. These impurities are condemned as vile not merely because they involve the recognition of other gods, but because they are inherently wrong in themselves. In Lev. 19:11,12 "the Holy One" prohibits stealing, unjust dealings, lying, and false swearing. In Leviticus 18 and 20 incest is forbidden. In Lev. 19:13 robbery and withholding of wages is condemned. Many precepts of a positive kind are prescribed as being particularly pleasing to 'the holy one': just weights and measures are enjoined (Lev. 19:35,36), parents are to be honoured (19:3), the deaf, blind and aged are to be respected (19:14,32), gleanings of the har-

vest are to be left for the poor (Lev. 23:22; 19:9-10), one must not rule over a brother with rigor (25:43,53) and a poor relation must be supported (25:25,35ff). The practical instructions reach their best in these words:

"Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thy heart;...thou shalt not take vengeance nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people; but thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself...If a stranger sojourn with thee in your land, ye shall do him no wrong...thou shalt love him as thyself" (19:17f,33f).

Yahweh forbids necromancy (Lev. 18:31 and Lev. 20:6-7) not only because it involves the recognition of powers other than His, but because it is inherently wrong. Yahweh repudiates the practice altogether, and does not suggest any way by which divination can be made specifically Yahwistic in contrast to the methods or ritual of Canaanitish necromancy.

All these specific injunctions throw a flood of light on the meaning of Lev. 19:2f, "Ye shall be holy: for I the Lord your God am holy." Yahweh wants His people to be holy in a moral sense as well as in a ceremonial sense. Why? Because He is 'holy' in a moral sense. He is 'righteous'. That seems to be the plain implication. It is true that the moral and the ritual are placed on a par in the Law of Holiness, and that Yahweh seems as eager

for ceremonial holiness as He is for moral holiness.

("What might be called aesthetic or physical unholiness was held offensive to the nature of God in the real sense, in a sense as real as moral offences were offensive to Him; and the purifications were true removals of these real causes of offence.")<sup>1</sup> Yet our contention stands: even in the Code the ethical quality in holiness is definitely present.

We have striking examples of the ethicization of the idea of holiness in the Psalms. For example, Psalm 15:1,2: "Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart." Also in Psalm 24:3,4: "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully." Jehovah requires this brand of holiness in His people, because His own holiness is moral through and through.

But it was left to the prophets of Israel to give the doctrine of God's holiness its fundamental ethical content. Jehovah was conceived of by the 8th century prophets to be supremely a God of righteousness. Consequently, under the influence of the prophets, the conception of God's

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<sup>1</sup> A. B. Davidson, Old Testament Theology, p. 159



holiness became charged with ethical significance. Whatever else they might have had in mind when they spoke of God as 'holy', they were certainly thinking of His moral perfection. "The Lord of hosts shall be exalted in judgment, and God that is holy shall be sanctified in righteousness" (Isaiah 5:16). Speaking of "mine Holy One" the prophet Habakkuk says: "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity" (1:12,13).

The prophets made little of aesthetic or ceremonial holiness, which we find so prominent in the Levitical Law. They insisted on moral holiness. The only kind of holiness that could satisfy "the Holy One" was the holiness of character and conduct, for His holiness is the holiness of righteousness. (See Amos 4 & 5; Isaiah 1:10-24.)

The prophets' insistence upon the high moral character of Jehovah's holiness does not mean that they neglected to any degree the conceptions of His divinity, His manifested grandeur, His unsearchableness, His terrific and unapproachable power. They emphasized and exalted all these as expressions of His holiness, but here they did not stop. They went on to lay such heavy stress ~~on~~ upon the righteousness of Jehovah and His ethical requirements that "the centre of gravity in religion" was shifted from ceremonial perfection to that of character and conduct.

Professor Mackintosh is right in his contention that the Hebrew prophets "were alone in offering to the ancient world a God of untainted holiness who insisted on a life of moral integrity in His worshippers. In their messages, and there only, we are face to face with a God who cares more for goodness, right conduct, humility, and mercy than for anything else in the world; who speaks in the midst of those that crowd His temple: 'Wash you, make you clean...cease to do evil, learn to do well, seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.'"<sup>1</sup> Under the influence of the prophets the idea of holiness passed from an outward to an inward sphere, from the notion of external consecration or dedication to that of inner moral sanctity.

It is in Isaiah, "the prophet of holiness," that the ethical significance of divine holiness gains its fullest expression. In Isaiah's thinking, the fundamental conception which underlies the word 'holy', is moral purity or righteousness. In the temple experience (Isaiah vi) the prophet feels something more than his creaturely infirmities as he stands in the presence of Jehovah's holiness. He feels also his sin, his uncleanness in a moral sense. His vision of 'the Holy One' compels him to ex-

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<sup>1</sup> The Originality of the Christian Message, p. 43

claim: "Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts."

It is clear from the whole drift of Isaiah's prophecy that his oft-repeated phrase, 'the Holy One of Israel', meant that Jehovah had a specific moral character with which the conduct of His people must be brought into agreement. When the people refused the way of righteousness they were rebelling against Jehovah's holiness. And when Isaiah censured Israel's moral apostasy, they said, "Get you out of the way, turn aside out of the path, cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us" (Isa. 33:11). It was the holiness of Jehovah which disturbed them in their wilful iniquity. He simply would not be satisfied with the affluence of their ceremonies and their sacrifices. On this point Montefiore says:<sup>1</sup> "When he (Isaiah) calls Yahweh, as he frequently does, the Holy One of Israel, it is in virtue of Yahweh's moral purity that he so describes Him. The teaching of the Holy One which the Israelites have despised is a moral teaching, the provocation with which they have provoked His holiness is a moral provocation." In Isaiah Jehovah is absolutely separate from all His creatures, but supremely from their

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<sup>1</sup> The Old Testament and After, pp. 48,49

moral evil. "The eyes of his glory" (3:8) are provoked at the sight of wrongdoing. The conception of holiness is thoroughly moralized in Isaiah, where it is presented as the antithesis of moral uncleanness. Only those shall "rejoice in the Holy One of Israel" (Isa. 29:19) who practice righteousness, and are free from moral iniquity. (Cf. Isaiah 33:14-16.) God's holiness is represented as being incompatible with iniquity and corruption, and angered by it. Ethical offences are abominable in the sight of Him Whose holiness is "exalted in judgment" and "sanctified in righteousness." As 'holy' the God of Isaiah looks for justice and condemns injustice and oppression (5:7; 1:17; 29:21; 28:17; 32:1,16; 10:2; 1:23). Jehovah is the embodiment of moral purity and the principles of ethical right. And not only do the more overt immoral offences fall under the judgment of Jehovah's holiness, but also the more subtle spiritual sins like vanity, pride and hardness of heart.

We must not conclude however, that Isaiah makes God's holiness to consist wholly in His moral perfection and requirements. One cannot read the 6th chapter of his prophecy without being impressed with his emphasis on the divine majesty and sublimity as a vital aspect of God's holiness. "In the year that king Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled

the temple" (vs. 1). That there was something more than moral purity involved in this vision of God is evidenced by the fact that not only did unclean Isaiah bow as unworthy in that Presence, but the seraphim as well veiled their faces and feet before the Divine. That was not because they were morally unclean or impure, but because they were creatures, and as such could not look upon the dazzling glory of the holy majesty of the Creator.

Isaiah's conception of divine holiness then, is not exclusively moral. Isaiah's God is transcendent, exalted, unapproachable; He is unsearchable; He is unfathomable mystery. In Isaiah morality and holiness are never taken as mere equivalents. Moral purity does not exhaust the meaning of holiness. It never appears detached from the underlying thought of majesty and power. In Professor Mackintosh's words,<sup>1</sup> "All that is in God is ethically qualified, but not all can be stated in purely ethical terms." The prophet never makes holiness synonymous with morality. 'Holy', as used by Isaiah, is a comprehensive word combining God's ethical attributes and those of exaltation and unapproachableness. The term does stand for the transcendent supermundane essence of deity as distinguished from that which is human, but it possesses also a distinctly moral quality, a fact which is clearly revealed

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<sup>1</sup> The Christian apprehension of God, p. 147

in Isaiah 6. The fact is, in Isaiah we find the two chief elements in holiness perfectly blended. God's supreme exaltation is combined with perfectly righteous character. In the thought of Isaiah, holiness came to cover "not only that moral purity and intolerance of sin but those metaphysical conceptions as well which we gather up under the name 'supernatural', and so, finally, by lifting the divine nature away from the change and vanity of this world, and emphasizing God's independence of all besides Himself, it has become the fittest expression we have for him as the infinite and Self-existent."<sup>1</sup>

We may conclude then, that in the prophets, as well as in the earlier literature of the Old Testament, God is still "mystery that awes." However much man's conception of God has through the centuries been "progressively clarified" and "progressively enriched" this quality of mystery has persisted and will persist. We come then, to the position expressed in these words of Bertrand Brannett:<sup>2</sup> "It is to be noted that Christianity asserts not merely that the holiness of God is profoundly ethical, but also that its ethical quality is such as is not, at least as yet, completely comprehensible by man."

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<sup>1</sup> G. A. Smith, Commentary on Isaiah, p. 164

<sup>2</sup> God the Worshipful, p. 104



## Holiness in the New Testament

In the New Testament the idea of holiness is expressed by the Greek word ἅγιος, and its derivatives. While the term 'holy' is used far less frequently in the New Testament, its usage there follows lines clearly marked in the Old Testament, and confirms what we have said as to the comprehensive meaning of the word.

Holiness as the expression of a relation to deity is carried on in a deepened form in the New Testament. Things are called 'holy' which bear a special relation to God. The covenant is holy (Luke 1:72); certain places are holy (Matt. 24:15; Acts 21:28); the Scriptures are called 'the holy scriptures' (Romans 1:2); God's law (Rom. 7:12), the calling (II Tim. 1:9), and the nation (I Pet. 2:9) are called 'holy'; the new Jerusalem is designated 'the holy city' (Rev. 21:2).

Persons are called 'holy' who bear a special relation to God, or who are set apart for the service of God. John the Baptist is "a just man and an holy" (Mark 6:20); the prophets are "His holy prophets" (Luke 1:70; Eph. 3:5). Christians are spoken of as "them which are sanctified" or simply as "saints" or "holy ones" (Eph. 1:1; Acts 9:13; 20:32; I Cor. 16:1; Rev. 13:10). Hagioi appears sixty times in the New Testament, 39 times in epistles of Paul.

The Spirit of God is spoken of as the "Holy Spirit" ninety-four times in the New Testament. The Spirit is 'holy' because it is His Spirit; it has the quality of divinity or deity. To be "filled with the spirit" is to experience the indwelling of God (Luke 1:15, 35, 67). The Spirit is 'holy' because He communicates the new life - the life of God (Mark 1:8; Rom. 15:16; Titus 3:5).

The epithet 'holy' is used of Jesus in ten passages. He is 'holy' because of His unique relation to God. He is "the Holy One of God" (Mark 1:24; Luke 4:34). As Phillips Brooks has said, "It was in His sonship to God that the secret of the holiness of Jesus lay."<sup>1</sup> As holy Jesus reveals the Father and is the instrument of His blessings (I John 10:36; Acts 4:30). And Because He is holy, Jesus is the source of sanctification in men ( I Cor. 6:11, 1:2; Eph. 5:26; Heb. 2:11).

When used of God, the term 'holy' stands, as in the prophets, for His ethical purity and absolute hostility to sin. "As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: but as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation" (I Pet. 1:14-15). But while the term carries a strong ethical content in the New Testament,

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<sup>1</sup> The Influence of Jesus, p. 69

even richer than that which we find in the prophets, the idea of transcendent majesty and awe-fulness is not lost. "It is a misinterpretation of the Christian doctrine of the Fatherhood of God to take it as involving a lessened sense of the transcendent majesty of God. The God of Jesus is as awe-inspiring as the God of the prophets. He is the Holy Father 'in heaven'. He is infinitely far from us and yet intimately near."<sup>1</sup>

In the New Testament the holiness of God is represented as the basis of His love. In John 17:11 Jesus prays: "Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me; for they are thine." Thus holiness appears as peculiarly the attribute of God as Father, and an act of love on God's part appears as a fit expression of His holiness. In Luke 1:49, God is called holy because of His overflowing mercy and grace to His people: "For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name. And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation."

Thus we see that in the New Testament holiness is not only the source of God's ethical requirements, but the expression also of His redemptive love. The prophets make something of this, but it is carried to a more com-

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<sup>1</sup> H. Maldwyn Hughes, The Christian Idea of God, pp. 40,41

plete stage in the New Testament. The holiness of God which Jesus revealed was no mere holiness of separation from sinful men. It was rather a holiness which offered itself to men, and came down to them with redemptive purpose in Jesus Who willingly identified Himself with sinful men, and took their unholiness upon Himself.

There is then, no tension between holiness and love. Holiness does not stand for righteousness as distinguished from love. As 'holy' God judges; as 'holy' He justifies. In the Bible conception of holiness we have a perfect fusion of love and righteousness, for each of these ideas is present in God's moral perfection. Holiness issues in something more than bare justice; it issues in redemptive grace. Its final and most complete unveiling is seen in the Cross, where sin is revealed and judged, and where saving grace is poured out - "grace to cover all my sin." If a man would see what the holiness of God is, let him go to Calvary.

SECTION I

CALVIN'S DOCTRINE OF THE HOLINESS OF GOD

Chapter I  
THE MAJESTY OF GOD

It is by no means a simple task to get at Calvin's doctrine of the holiness of God. Anyone who turns to his Institutes expecting to find there a special section devoted particularly to a treatment of holiness will be disappointed. Indeed, there is not in all of Calvin's writings any detailed or orderly discussion of the nature and attributes of God. On this point Kostlin says:<sup>1</sup>

"There is not given in the Institutes any comprehensive presentation of the attributes, especially of the ethical attributes of God, nor is any such attempted anywhere afterwards; the first edition, which began with some comprehensive propositions about God as infinite wisdom, righteousness, mercy, etc., rather raises our expectation of something more in the later, more thoroughly worked out editions of the work: but these propositions fell out of the first edition and were never afterward developed."

How may we account for this? Why does this great theologian leave the topics of the nature and attributes of God without formal and detailed discussion? Dr. Warfield suggests that this is due to the distinctly literary quality of the Institutes. Since Calvin's purpose

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<sup>1</sup> Studien und Kritiken, Vol. I, pp. 61-62. Quoted by Warfield, Calvin and Calvinism, p. 164.



was religious and practical<sup>1</sup> rather than theological, his method was always literary rather than scholastic.

One reason why Calvin's conception of divine holiness does not occupy a conspicuous place in his writings is that the holiness of God was not one of the doctrines under discussion in his day. The period in which John Calvin lived and preached and wrote was one of heated controversy in matters that pertained to religion, and since Calvin wrote from a practical standpoint he dwelt quite naturally upon those features of the Christian faith and life which were under dispute.

Another reason which we may assign for this failure of Calvin to emphasize God's holiness is that he simply took for granted that his contemporaries knew what he meant by it. In his commentaries we find him passing over, without any comment at all, some of the classic Bible references to God as holy. Apparently he felt no need to interpret these passages and elaborate upon them. For example, there is that classic verse on holiness in Leviticus: "Speak unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say unto them, Ye shall be holy: for

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<sup>1</sup> P. J. Muller: "It is not with the doctrine of God, but with the worship of God that Calvin's first concern was engaged." (*De Godsleer van Calvijn*, p. 117) Quoted by Warfield, *Calvin and Calvinism*, p. 140.

Allan Menzies: "His teaching is extremely practical and always aims at edification." (*A Study of Calvin*, p. 217)

I the Lord your God am holy" (19:2). In the first volume of his Harmony of the Pentateuch, Calvin simply calls attention to this verse, but makes only a brief comment, which sheds no particular light on his idea of God's holiness. He lets it go by with little more than a vague and casual reference. Also in his commentary on the Psalms Calvin gives us no help when he comes to the following: "God hath spoken in his holiness" (Ps. 60:6); "O thou ~~holy~~ Holy One of Israel" (Ps. 71:22 & Ps. 89:18); and "... limited the Holy One of Israel" (Ps. 78:41). One might expect a Scriptural exegete to tell us what such phrases and clauses mean. Calvin evidently assumes that no explanation is needed. He doesn't give us any help either on Ps. 97:12, and Ps. 99:3,9. His treatment of the words, "Holy, holy, holy, is Jehovah of hosts," in Isaiah 6 is also quite disappointing. He devotes a paragraph to the discussion of this sentence, but in his discussion the thing that appears to be uppermost in his mind is the fact that the word 'holy' is repeated three times. He does not attempt any explanation as to what the word 'holy' exactly signifies, though he does explain why it appears three times. He is absorbed in taking issue with the "heretics" who endeavour to prove from this that "there are three persons in one essence of the Godhead."

It must be said however, that the lack of any systematic or sufficient treatment of the nature and attri-

butes of God does not at all mean that Calvin has nothing to say upon these topics. It is only their formal and separate treatment which is lacking. Calvin treats of the attributes of God, but he does so indirectly. His doctrine of holiness is in his writings, but, to use the words of Dr. Warfield,<sup>1</sup> it "is present so to speak in solution, rather than in precipitate: distributed through the general discussion of the knowledge of God rather than gathered into one place and apportioned to formal rubrics."

Our task then, is to glean from Calvin's voluminous writings -- his Letters, Tracts, Commentaries and Sermons, as well as his Institutes -- all references to God as holy, and from these incidental allusions (and for the most part they are incidental) construct his conception of the holiness of God.

In our study we have gained practically no help at all from the various books and articles which treat of Calvin's theology. One might expect that in any comprehensive treatment of the great reformer's doctrines some account would be given of his doctrine of God's holiness. Such however, is not the case. One looks in vain for even a brief summary of his conception of God as holy. Undoubtedly this is due in part to the fact which we have just pointed out, that nowhere does Calvin himself give any

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<sup>1</sup> Calvin and Calvinism, p. 143

satisfactory statement or discussion of his own views on the subject.

It will have to be stated at the outset that Calvin makes rather infrequent use of the particular terms 'holy' and 'holiness' as applied to God. We do find them used often enough however, to ascertain what he means by them. After a careful study of these references we are convinced that there are two ideas which seem to be dominant in Calvin's idea of the holiness of God: one is God's absolute divinity, and the other is His absolute moral perfection. These qualities in God Calvin refers to again and again, but, instead of the more inclusive word 'holiness', he uses such words as 'majesty' or 'glory', and 'righteousness' or 'purity' to denote them. We may say then, that the majesty of God and the righteousness of God form the warp and woof of Calvin's doctrine of God's holiness. We may now devote some space to the consideration of the first of these, namely, the majesty of God.

### The Majesty of God

By the holiness of God Calvin means in part that quality in Him which sets Him apart and distinguishes Him from all else beside. And, as we have seen in our introductory section, this idea of separation is very probably the root-meaning of holiness. The following passages

taken from Calvin's commentaries emphasize the idea of holiness as separateness:

"The word 'sanctitas', holiness, expresses that glory which separates God from all his creatures."<sup>1</sup>

"We see the reason why he calls him 'the Holy One', and 'the inhabitant of the holy and lofty place'. It is in order to inform us how much he differs from us, and how unlike he is to our nature."<sup>2</sup>

God alone is 'holy', because He alone is God. Man is a creature, and therefore un-holy. Man stands at a great distance from Him because of His holiness - His deity. The thought expressed in the two references quoted above is something quite apart from any particular moral consideration. That is never completely lost sight of, but here the emphasis is certainly on the fact that the distance between God and man is due to the fact that He is transcendent deity and man is a mere creature. This is brought out quite clearly in Calvin's explanation of the unholiness of heathen gods. The idols of the heathen are unholy, not because they have moral imperfections, but simply because they are not true deity. There is in them no quality which makes them divine. Commenting on Psalm xcix:5 ("Exalt Jehovah our God and worship at his foot-

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<sup>1</sup> Harmony of the Pentateuch, Vol. I, p. 259

<sup>2</sup> Isaiah, Vol. IV, pp. 213-214

stool: he is holy"), Calvin says:<sup>1</sup>

"The reason assigned for exalting Jehovah our God, and worshipping at his footstool, contains an antithesis: he is holy. For the prophet, in hallowing the names of the one God, declares all the idols of the heathen to be unholy; as if he should say, Although the heathen claim for their idols an imaginary sanctity, they are nevertheless very vanity, an offence, and abomination."

The unholiness which Calvin has here expressed by the words "vanity", "offence", "abomination", is quite evidently due to some limitation other than moral imperfection.

God's holiness then, stands for that quality in Him which distinguishes Him from all created things - His absolute divinity. "He (the psalmist) calls God holy, because he continues always like himself."<sup>2</sup> And this difference between God and His creatures is one not merely of degree, but of kind and quality. Calvin would have his readers remember always that God is God, and man is man; God is God, and the universe is the universe. His God is the God of Isaiah, "high and lifted up;" He is the Wholly Other. Calvin's God is unutterably transcendent, and has nothing in common with man. We have a modern echo of this Calvinistic principle in these

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<sup>1</sup> Psalms, Vol. IV, p. 79

<sup>2</sup> Psalms, Vol. I, p. 364



words from the pen of Professor Karl Barth:<sup>1</sup> "God, who is distinguished qualitatively from men and from everything human, and must never be identified with anything we name, or experience, or conceive, or worship, as God."

Calvin's use of the term 'holiness' to denote the idea of Godhead is strikingly illustrated in his exegesis of Psalm 89:35 ("Once have I sworn by my holiness"):<sup>2</sup>

"He affirms that he sware by his holiness, because a greater than himself is not to be found, by whom he could swear....It is a more emphatic manner of expression for him to say, by my holiness, than if he had said, by myself, not only because it magnifies and exalts his glory, but also because it is far more fitted for the confirmation of faith."

To Calvin then, holiness is much more than simply a name for the attribute of moral purity/in God. Rather it is a term which describes His transcendent majesty. It is the highest name for God. It sets forth His absolute Godhead. It stands for that quality in Him which cannot be contained in any attribute or combination of attributes. It is much more than the sum total of these.

And the Old Testament idea that holiness as applied to things and persons and nations is the result of a relation to deity rather than the result of any special

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<sup>1</sup> Romans (E.T.), p. 330f

<sup>2</sup> Psalms, Vol. III, p. 445

quality inherent in them is certainly present in Calvin. Commenting on Lev. 22:10, he speaks of "the majesty of sacred things."<sup>1</sup> In his commentary on Genesis, he calls Noah "holy Noah" in the same section where he treats of Noah's excessive drinking and drunkenness.<sup>2</sup> And he also calls Isaac "the holy patriarch."<sup>3</sup> "Israel was holiness unto the Lord" (Jer. 2:3) in that "they were separated from all others nations, so that the glory of God shone only among them."<sup>4</sup> "...by admitting them to alliance with him, he had at the same time adorned them with his holiness."<sup>5</sup> This may be further illustrated by some passages from his commentary on Isaiah, where he stresses the point that the prophet calls God 'holy' because he chose and separated a people (Israel) to Himself that they might be His people and ~~xxx~~ that they might become the agent of His purposes:

"He therefore calls God Holy, not only as viewed in himself, but from the effect produced, because he has ~~sanctified~~ or separated to himself the children of Abraham."<sup>6</sup>

"He is called Holy, because he has chosen and separated a people, that he might consecrate them to himself; for by this title he reminds them of the adoption by which

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<sup>1</sup> ~~Isaiah, Vol. I, p. 404~~ Harm. of Pent., Vol. II, p. 243  
<sup>2</sup> Genesis, Vol. I, p. 271  
<sup>3</sup> Ibid., Vol. II, p. 65  
<sup>4</sup> Jeremiah, Vol. I, p. 72  
<sup>5</sup> Isaiah, Vol. I, p. 45  
<sup>6</sup> Ibid., Vol. II, p. 26

he united them to himself in a peculiar manner, that they may understand that he will be their Father and Saviour. And for the same reason we ought now to acknowledge him as our Holy One, because he has set us apart to be members of the Church."<sup>1</sup>

"In this sense he calls himself The Holy One of Israel, because while the whole human race is by nature estranged from him, he hath chosen his people that he might set them apart to be his own."<sup>2</sup>

Now Calvin uses the term "majesty" more frequently than he does the term "holiness" to denote the quality of absolute divinity in God. When he speaks of the majesty of God, he means God's "eternal essence," that which constitutes Him God. It is "the infinite glory of God" before which men and angels veil their creaturely faces for they cannot bear the sight. Calvin employs the term "majesty" to bring into relief God's sacredness or divinity, His inaccessible exaltation and power, His "incomprehensible brightness," His "inviolable supremacy," the "immense perfection of His glory." Says Calvin: "Whenever God calls Himself Jehovah, it should suggest His majesty."<sup>3</sup>

It is interesting to note that occasionally Calvin seems to use "holiness" and "majesty" interchangeably. In his Harmony of the Pentateuch, he speaks of "the

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah, Vol. III, p. 338

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 320

<sup>3</sup> Harmony of Pent., Vol. I, p. 343

holiness of God's name," and "the majesty of God's name."<sup>1</sup> In each case Calvin seems to be referring to the same quality in God. God's name is 'holy' simply because it is His name.

In the sixth chapter of the prophecy of Isaiah we have what is perhaps the finest passage on the holiness of God in the Scriptures. This passage, says Calvin, is a description of the 'majesty' of God. What Isaiah saw in his vision in the temple that day was "an illustrious display of the majesty of God."<sup>2</sup> "There was...exhibited to Isaiah such a form as enabled him, according to his capacity, to perceive the inconceivable majesty of God."<sup>3</sup> The song the seraphim sang was a hymn to the 'majesty' of God, to His transcendent glory which constituted Him true deity and exalted Him above all that is in the heavens above, or on the earth beneath. Calvin explains that the reason the seraphim repeat the word 'holy' three times is that 'holiness' or 'majesty' of God supplied them with inexhaustible reasons for singing the praises of Jehovah. Remembering that Calvin calls this whole vision of Isaiah's "an illustrious display of the majesty of God" it would seem that in his mind 'majesty' and 'holiness' stood for the same quality in God, His inaccessi-

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<sup>1</sup> See: Harmony of Pent., Vol. I, p. 259; Vol. II, pp. 408-412; Vol. IV, p. 95.

<sup>2</sup> Isaiah, Vol. I, p. 199

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 203

ble exaltation, His incomprehensible divinity. That Calvin often means the same thing by the two words, 'holiness' and 'majesty' is further illustrated in his comment on Isaiah 12:6.<sup>1</sup> He says that the prophet calls God 'the Holy One' in order that "His majesty may fill our minds with reverence towards him." It must be said therefore, that Calvin conceives the holiness of God to be something infinitely more comprehensive than merely moral perfection. The exaltation of Him Who is "high and lifted up" is an exaltation due to His absolute purity, but it is more, vastly more. It is an exaltation due to His "inviolable supremacy" as the true and only Deity. The Trisagion, "holy, holy, holy," becomes in Calvin's mind practically equivalent to "God, God, God." He would say that while 'holiness' denotes Jehovah's moral perfection, it denotes also His sacredness or divinity; it is the designation of His Majesty, His Godhead.

Throughout all of Calvin's works we find him making much of the fact that this glorious holiness or majesty of God transcends all human thought. It is, he says, "inconceivable", "overwhelming". It cannot be fully grasped by man's intellect, nor adequately expressed by ~~the~~

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah, Vol. I, p. 404

human language. It is an "unspeakably bright and glorious majesty which lays prostrate all our faculties."<sup>1</sup> In the presence of it man is rendered speechless. "His essence, indeed, is incomprehensible, utterly transcending all human thought."<sup>2</sup> "...the minds of men and all their senses sink far below the loftiness of God."<sup>3</sup> It is "that majesty which passeth our understanding."<sup>4</sup> The holy majesty of Jehovah is "immense" and "terrible," in the presence of which man is reduced to nothing, and stands in dire peril:

"If the earth trembles at the presence of God, if the mountains melt, if darkness over-spreads the heavens, what must happen to miserable man! Nay, since the immense majesty of God cannot be comprehended even by angels, but rather absorbs them; were his glory to shine on us it would destroy us, and reduce us to nothing, unless he sustained and protected us."<sup>5</sup>

And men are "very foolish" who desire to look upon God in His "naked majesty." As "the eyes of our body cannot endure the sight of the natural sun" so the eyes of our mind cannot bear the "brightness of the majesty of God."<sup>6</sup> Men are privileged to look upon the expression or revelation of God's majesty in the external world, but to attempt to see His majesty in its real essence is

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah, Vol. I, p. 204

<sup>2</sup> Institutes, Vol. I, book i, p. 65.

<sup>3</sup> Harm. of Pent., Vol. III, p. 330

<sup>4</sup> Sermons of M. Luther and J. Calvin, p. 33

<sup>5</sup> Genesis, Vol. II, p. 202

<sup>6</sup> ~~Revelation, Vol. I, p. 145~~ Secret Prov. of God, p. 36



both rash and foolish. It is, to use Calvin's own words, "worse than madness....to trifle with mysteries so deep, and so profoundly adorable."<sup>1</sup> In his commentary on the Psalms he says:<sup>2</sup>

"Those who seek to see him in his naked majesty are certainly very foolish. That we may enjoy the sight of him, he must come forth to view with his clothing; that is to say, we must cast our eyes upon the very beautiful fabric of the world in which he wishes to be seen by us, and not to be too curious and rash in searching into his secret essence." (Italics are mine.)

The inability of men to look upon God's holiness explains why God so often in Scripture reveals Himself in a visible form. The necessity to adjust His revelation to the limitations of human capacity accounts for the anthropomorphism which is so prominent in the Bible, particularly in the literature of the Old Testament. Since men cannot bear the dazzling lustre of the Divine Glory, God has accommodated Himself to their human limitations and frailties. "The brightness of his glory is such, that the sight of Him, as He is, by our naked vision, would absorb and overwhelm all our senses, in a moment. He has therefore ever so revealed himself, as men were able to bear the revelation."<sup>3</sup> The following passages selected from Calvin's sermons and commentaries illustrate his insistence upon the inconceivableness

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<sup>1</sup> Secret Providence of God, p. 8

<sup>2</sup> Psalms, Vol. IV, p. 145

<sup>3</sup> Secret Providence, p. 34

and the blinding, overwhelming splendour of God's transcendent majesty:

"Why doth he make himself to have eyes, to have ears, and to have a nose? Why doth he take upon him men's affections? Why is it that he saith he is angry, he is sorry? Is it not because we cannot comprehend him in his incomprehensible majesty?"<sup>1</sup>

"He formeth his speech to us in his word, according to our capacity. If God should speak according to his majesty, his speech would be beyond our comprehension; it would utterly confound us! For if our eyes be not able to abide the brightness of the sun, would our minds be able to comprehend the infinite majesty of God?"<sup>2</sup>

"Yet God did not fully manifest his glory to the holy fathers, but assumed a form by means of which they might apprehend him according to the measure of their capacities; for, as the majesty of God is infinite, it cannot be comprehended by the human mind, and by its magnitude it absorbs the whole world. Besides, it follows of necessity that men, on account of their infirmity, must not only faint, but be altogether annihilated in the presence of God. Wherefore, Moses does not mean that God was seen in his true nature and greatness, but in such a manner as Isaac was able to bear the sight."<sup>3</sup> (The italics are mine.)

The above passages remind us of the conception of God which we find in the closing chapters of the book of Job. In these chapters the 'majesty' of God is incomprehensible and dazzling. It is a "terrible majesty" in the presence of which all of man's faculties are con-

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<sup>1</sup> Sermons of M. Luther and J. Calvin, p. 101

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 105, 106

<sup>3</sup> Genesis, Vol. II, pp. 69, 70

founded. "Out of the north cometh golden splendor:  
God hath upon him terrible majesty. Touching the Al-  
mighty, we cannot find him out."<sup>1</sup>

And since the finite mind of man is incapable of penetrating to God's real essence we must be content with that knowledge of Him which He has seen fit to reveal. Created man goes too far, he throws contempt upon the Divine Majesty, by attempting to know that which is beyond his capacity and his right. Since the "infinite brightness" dazzles our mental vision, "it behoves us not to be too acute in our penetration into the splendour of the Divine Majesty."<sup>2</sup> We must keep our inquiries concerning the being and character of God within the limits which He has set for us. Calvin makes quite a point of this in his treatment of the sixth chapter of the prophecy of Isaiah. He says:

"The two wings with which they cover their faces show plainly enough that even angels cannot endure God's brightness, and that they are dazzled by it in the same manner as when we attempt to gaze upon the radiance of the sun. And if angels are overwhelmed by the majesty of God, how great will be the rashness of men if they venture to intrude so far! Let us, therefore, learn that our inquiries concerning God ought never to go beyond what is proper and lawful, that our knowledge may soberly and modestly taste what is far above our capacity."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Job 37:22,23 (R. V.)

<sup>2</sup> Secret Prov. of God, p. 36

<sup>3</sup> Isaiah, Vol. I, p. 203 (The italics are mine.)



"It was always the will of God to repress the insolence of men, in pushing their inquiries about his majesty beyond what is proper; for on this point almost all men are too rash and daring. They wish to rise above the clouds, and to penetrate into the secrets of God....Whenever, therefore, smoke of this kind is mentioned, let us know that it lays a restraint upon us from indulging curiosity in our researches into the purpose of God."<sup>1</sup>

Calvin insists that 'majesty' is a quality which belongs strictly and exclusively to God and must not be ascribed to any creature. "All majesty is comprehended in God alone."<sup>2</sup> He alone merits our worship and our allegiance. We are not to give homage even to the heavenly angels. This men are prone to do because angels are looked upon as heavenly beings. However much they appear to surpass our human sphere, we must never forget that they too are creatures, and whatever glory they enjoy is communicated to them by God Himself. We are not therefore, to "prostrate ourselves before them in stupid adoration, and then ascribe to them the blessings which we owe to God alone."<sup>3</sup> Commenting on Isaiah 40:18, Calvin says:<sup>4</sup>

"The highest injury is done to God, not only by comparing his majesty with things

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah, Vol. I, pp. 206, 207

<sup>2</sup> Psalms, Vol. IV, p. 67

<sup>3</sup> Inst., I, i, p. 200

<sup>4</sup> Isaiah, Vol. III, p. 222

of no value, but even by not placing him far above all the angels, and everything that is reckoned divine."

And commenting on Psalm 89:7 ("God is very terrible in the assembly of the saints, and to be feared above all who are around him"), he says:<sup>1</sup>

"In these words is censured the devilish superstition, to which almost all men are prone, of exalting angels beyond measure, and without reason. But if the angels themselves tremble, and are afraid before the Divine Majesty, why should they not be regarded as subjects, and kept in their own rank, that God alone may have the sovereignty entirely to himself."

And neither are we to prostrate ourselves before any man. Man is a frail, helpless and sinful creature - he is "but rottenness and a worm," and we heap dishonour upon the majesty of God when we make man an object of adoration. In particular, no pope or priest is deserving of the reverence and homage which belong to God alone. The very thought of such a thing angers Calvin, and he inveighs against it with strong language. He refers to that incident in the tenth chapter of the Acts where Cornelius prostrates himself before Peter in a sort of half adoration and calls attention to the fact that the apostle wisely refuses such adoration. He says:<sup>2</sup>

"Yet Peter sternly forbids him. And why, but just because men never distinguish so accurately between the wor-

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<sup>1</sup> Psalms, Vol. III, p. 424

<sup>2</sup> Inst., I, i, p. 142



ship of God and the creatures as not to transfer promiscuously to the creature that which belongs to God."

Calvin's bitter denunciations of all forms of idolatry sprang from his jealousy for the honour of God's majesty. His commentaries abound in condemnations of idolatry in all its forms. Inasmuch as the divine holiness consists in separation from all finiteness of the creature, it must include also the impossibility of forming an image of the holy God. To invent images ~~and then~~ and then fall before them in worship is blasphemy and sin of the highest order. All idolatry is a direct affront to the Most High. And those who are found guilty of idolatry merit the death penalty. God's holiness is profaned by all bowing down to graven images. And it is unthinkable that He will suffer his 'glory' to be transferred to images. Speaking of the Israelites prostrating themselves before the golden calf in Exodus 32, Calvin says:<sup>1</sup>

"If it is insulting to God to force Him into the likeness of men, with how much greater and more inexcusable ignominy is His majesty defiled, when He is compared to brute animals."

And there is an even better statement of Calvin's position in the second volume of his Harmony of the Pentateuch:<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Harm. of the Pent., Vol. III, p. 334  
<sup>2</sup> Ibid., Vol. II, p. 108



"Therefore, to devise any image of God, is in itself impious; because by this corruption His Majesty is adulterated, and He is figured to be other than He is."

The heinousness of idolatry, says Calvin, lies in the fact that it "tarnishes God's glory." "...a multitude of gods destroys and suppresses the true knowledge of one God only, and tarnishes his glory."<sup>1</sup> In the following passage from his Institutes this point is stressed, and the words 'glory' and 'majesty' are used interchangeably:

"We think it unlawful to give a visible shape to God, because...it cannot be done without, in some degree tarnishing his glory...The only things, therefore, which ought to be painted or sculptured, are things which can be presented to the eye; the majesty of God, which is far beyond the reach of any eye, must not be dishonoured by unbecoming representations."<sup>2</sup>

We must agree with Dr. Benjamin Warfield when he says that "Into the heart of none more than into his (Calvin's) did the vision of the glory of God shine; and no one has been more determined than he not to give the glory of God to another."<sup>3</sup>

In this chapter we have been emphasizing the fact that Calvin's doctrine of the 'majesty of God' is in reality the warp of his doctrine of Divine Holiness. If this can be justly contended for, and we believe it can, we see how large and important a place the idea of God's

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<sup>1</sup> Psalms, Vol. IV, p. 83

<sup>2</sup> Inst., I, i, p. 133

<sup>3</sup> Pamphlet on "Calvin as a Theologian and Calvinism Today," p. 11.

holiness does occupy in Calvin's thinking and in all his works. It is true that he does not devote any space to an orderly discussion of holiness, but if we are right in our contention that Calvin's doctrine of divine holiness finds partial expression in his doctrine of transcendent majesty, then it becomes at once one of his dominant ideas. It is a theme to which he returns again and again with intellectual and spiritual fervour.

## Chapter II.

### THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD

John Calvin's doctrine of the holiness of God is not wholly contained in his doctrine of divine majesty. Any discussion of his idea of holiness would be incomplete if it were to go no further than an investigation of his doctrine of God's ineffable glory or majesty. This is the place to begin, but if we are to know Calvin's doctrine of God as 'holy' in its entirety, we must go on to inquire into his conception of the 'righteousness' of God which is, as we have stated before, the weft of his doctrine of holiness.

The divine majesty is to Calvin no empty abstraction. It has definite content. God's majesty is a moral majesty. The holy God is separate from His creatures not only because He is Divinity, but because He is absolute 'righteousness' as well. And man is at a great distance from the holy and living God not only because he is a creature, but more particularly because he is an impure, iniquitous creature. With Calvin, the heart of Jehovah's utter difference from man is His perfect moral supremacy. Impure men cannot - dare not - come near the 'majesty' of God until they have passed through a process of purification: "When they came to the temple of Jerusalem, the water was ready, even at the entrance, that every one might purify himself, and thus come near the majesty of God."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sermons of M. Luther and J. Calvin, p. 193

Nothing is more clear in Calvin's writings than the fact that divine holiness is not indifferent to evil. Jehovah's majesty is righteous and is therefore repulsed and angered by evil in all its forms, and cannot have any fellowship at all with evil men. (Indeed, this is one dominant reason why Jehovah is the only true and 'holy' God and the deities of the heathen are idols. His 'majesty' transcends all other deities because it is a moral majesty.) Holiness as a moral quality is strongly suggested by these words from Calvin's commentary on Isaiah:<sup>1</sup>

"When he (i.e. Isaiah) calls God 'the Holy One of Israel,' he presents in a striking light the wickedness and ingratitude of the people."

The holy God finds an intimate fellowship with His creatures possible only through the interposing of His sinless Son Who covers man's impurity with His own spotless righteousness. (This point will receive fuller treatment in subsequent pages.)

Calvin's doctrine of the holiness of God is ethical through and through. His total view of holiness may be concisely stated in this sentence from the pen of Prof. Mackintosh:<sup>2</sup> "Divine holiness is an utter sublimity based or rooted in moral perfection." It would be difficult to find a definition of the holiness of God which more perfectly expresses Calvin's idea on this theme.

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah, Vol. II, p. 390

<sup>2</sup> The Christian Apprehension of God, p. 153

It is quite clear from Calvin's interpretation of Isaiah vi. that the 'majesty' of God, which he says is strikingly revealed there, is, in his mind, charged with ethical content. This is manifest in his treatment of the phrases, "a man of unclean lips" and "a people of unclean lips." Commenting on the first of these phrases, Calvin says:<sup>1</sup>

"Even though he (Isaiah) was in other respects a sinner, yet because the office which he held was holy, this part of his body was sacred; and as it does not correspond to the divine holiness, he confesses that even in that part which in itself is more holy, he is polluted."

There is a strong implication in the above reference that divine holiness is offended by moral uncleanness. Man as a creature cannot come near the glory of God's 'majesty', but more especially man as a sinner.

That to Calvin the holiness of God definitely includes an ethical quality may also be shown by his treatment of the phrase, "a people of unclean lips." On this point he says:<sup>2</sup>

"This is added by way of explanation; for he includes himself as an individual in the number of the common people, tainted with that pollution which extends to the whole body, and forgets the purity which he had received from God, because it cannot dwell in his presence...in whose sight our purity is impure."

Here the words 'tainted,' 'pollution', 'purity' and 'impure'

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah, Vol. I, pp. 208, 209

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 209

are significant. Obviously there was something in the 'majesty' of God which made Isaiah keenly aware of his impurity and moral pollution. Before a man can stand before the overwhelming majesty of the Holy One he must be "cleansed," and only the Holy One Himself can effect that. "God alone...can cleanse our pollution, in whatever part it exists...all purity flows from God alone."<sup>1</sup> The word 'majesty' is not a big enough word to cover all that Calvin has in mind when he speaks of the holiness of God. We need another word which we may use as a designation of that quality in divine holiness which causes it to recoil from all human sinfulness. We believe that the word 'righteousness' satisfies this need. We have chosen it in preference to the word 'purity' for, while it conveys the idea of purity, it is more comprehensive.

God is holy then, not only because He is absolute 'majesty' or divinity, but also because He is 'righteousness' - because He is infinite, transcendent goodness. God is holy because He is as morally spotless as the light, and because He always does righteous acts. Dr. W. A. Brown is right when he says that "The God of the Calvinist is approached through the conscience, and his name is Righteousness."<sup>2</sup> And Calvin would certainly agree with Prof.

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah, Vol. I, p. 210

<sup>2</sup> God at work, p. 130 (footnote)



Karl Barth when he says that "the deepest, innermost, surest fact of life" is that "God is righteous."<sup>1</sup> The moral perfection of God receives in all of Calvin's writings constant and intensive stress, and he knows nothing of divine holiness apart from this divine characteristic. In his Institutes Calvin speaks of "that spotless righteousness of God, before which even angels are not clean,"<sup>2</sup> "the eyes of God, before which even the stars are not clean,"<sup>3</sup> and "the spotless purity of God, which cannot bear iniquity."<sup>4</sup>

Calvin makes much of the fact that God's purity is so spotless that in comparison man's highest purity is uncleanness. The following passages will illustrate just how acutely Calvin felt this:

"For if the stars which shine most brightly by night lose their brightness on the appearance of the sun, what think we will be the case with the highest purity of man when contrasted with the purity of God?"<sup>5</sup>

"God is our judge, to whom, we know, nothing is concealed or unknown, in whose sight our purity is impure."<sup>6</sup>

"Although Job was not conscious of offending, he is still dumb with astonishment, because he sees that God could not be appeased even by the sanctity of angels, were their works weighed in that supreme balance."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Word of God, p. 9  
<sup>2</sup> Inst., II, iii, p. 368  
<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 361  
<sup>4</sup> Ibid., I, ii, p. 432  
<sup>5</sup> Ibid., II, iii, p. 338  
<sup>6</sup> Isaiah, Vol. I, p. 209  
<sup>7</sup> Inst., II, iii, p. 335

It should be made plain that with Calvin the 'righteousness' of God is not merely a negative quality. It is not just the freedom from stain or wrong which constitutes His holiness. Divine holiness is not made up of omissions. It is not sinlessness merely. It is rather positive moral rightness. God is holy because He is the fountain of all true righteousness. In the words of Dr. A. H. Strong, "God is holy in that he is the source and standard of the right."<sup>1</sup>

The righteousness of God is active. He not only is righteous; He does righteous acts. His righteousness is continually expressing itself in certain moral characteristics, and giving itself in defence of what is right. God is <sup>actively</sup> aggressively on the side of the right and the just in human relationships. God "of his own nature loves righteousness and equity," and will establish it and defend it. Commenting on Psalm 8:17 ("I will praise Jehovah according to his righteousness."), Calvin says:<sup>2</sup>

"The righteousness of God is here to be understood of his faithfulness, which he makes good to his servants in defending and preserving their lives. God does not shut up or conceal his righteousness from our view in the secret recesses of his own mind, but manifests it for our advantage when he defends us against all wrongful violence, delivers us from oppression, and preserves us in safety, although wicked men make war upon us and persecute us."

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<sup>1</sup> Systematic Theology, Vol. I, p. 273

<sup>2</sup> Psalms, Vol. I, p. 92

And commenting on Psalm 9:8 ("He shall judge the world in righteousness."), he says:<sup>1</sup>

"...since he judges the nations in righteousness, he will not suffer injustice and oppression always to reign with impunity in the world, nor deny his aid to the innocent."

God's holiness is the foundation of His wrath against all social evils which prey upon the righteous and upon the innocent - injustices, oppressions, violence and persecution. For the man who stands before God robed in the righteousness of Christ, God's holiness furnishes abundant cause for confidence and rejoicing. It is the pledge of His faithfulness to and defence of the right and those who do the right. The right must ultimately prevail, for God is 'holy' in a profoundly ethical sense.

That the holiness of God is, according to Calvin, always distinctly moral, may be further shown by his interpretation of the holiness of Jesus. In Jesus Christ holiness as 'majesty' is certainly present. Calvin says that Jesus was given the title, Holy One of God, in Luke 4:33 "because he was to be distinguished and separated from all others, as endued with eminent grace, and as the Head of the whole Church."<sup>2</sup> And in one of his sermons he uses the word 'majesty' as a designation of Jesus' "Godhead" and "infinite essence." He says:<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Psalms, Vol. I, p. 118

<sup>2</sup> Harmony of Matthew, Mark and Luke, Vol. I, p. 248

<sup>3</sup> Sermons of M. Luther and J. Calvin, p. 27

"Although the Scriptures bear no record of the Godhead of Christ Jesus, it is impossible for us to know him as our Saviour, unless we admit that he possesses the whole majesty of God...Therefore let us be thoroughly resolved in this point, whenever we speak of Jesus Christ, that we lift our thoughts on high, and worship this majesty which he had from everlasting, and this infinite essence which he enjoyed before he clothed himself in humility."

But the holiness of Jesus has more in it than 'majesty.' It is surcharged with 'righteousness.' Jesus is holy because He is sinless - because He is absolute moral perfection. Calvin refers most infrequently to the holiness of Jesus, but the following quotations will illustrate his conception of the ethical holiness of our Lord:

"Christ, exempt from the common lot of men, is alone free from every sin; hence in him alone is found real holiness and innocency."<sup>1</sup>

"Behold the Son of God, who is the fountain of all holiness and righteousness! shall we endeavour to hide ourselves, and cloak all our filthiness, be it ever so shameful, under his name?"<sup>2</sup>

"...as a Mediator, free from all taint, he may by his own holiness procure the favour of God for us."<sup>3</sup>

Jesus Christ is 'holy' because He is "free from every sin," "free from all taint," and the "fountain of all holiness and righteousness." He is supreme above all other men because there is in Him the 'majesty' which constitutes Him

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<sup>1</sup> Commentary on Hebrews, p. 176  
<sup>2</sup> Sermons of M. Luther and J. Calvin, p. 94  
<sup>3</sup> Inst., II, iii, p. 43

God. When we worship His 'majesty' we bow before His "infinite essence" and His "Godhead." But our Lord's supremacy is due also to His perfect ethical holiness. He is free from all sin and taint, but other men are all sinful and tainted. Calvin's conception of the holiness of Jesus does give us a key to his understanding of the holiness of God.

That Calvin's view of divine holiness is at bottom strongly ethical may be seen further in the use which he makes of the word when referring to the type of holiness which God requires of His people. He requires a holiness which is much more than a holiness of relation - an aesthetic or ceremonial holiness. He requires a holiness of life. Men must be morally holy. Why? Because God is Himself holy in that sense, and can be satisfied with nothing else beside in those whom He has made the recipients of His grace. God can have no fellowship with men who practise unholiness. And this allows of no exception.

"He (the psalmist) shows from the very nature of God, that we cannot be judged and acknowledged to be his servants unless we depart from sin, and practise holiness."<sup>1</sup>

"For this cause, let us see that we cleanse ourselves from all our filthiness, and renounce it, that we may be a fit place for God's holiness to dwell in...What are we? There is nothing but rottenness in us: I speak not of the body only, but more particularly of the soul, which is still more infected: and yet we see the Lord will build us up, that we may be fit temples for his majesty to reside in."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Psalms, Vol. IV, p. 67

<sup>2</sup> Sermons of M. Luther and J. Calvin, p. 117



"Impure and wicked men may sing the praises of God with open mouth, but assuredly, they do nothing else than pollute and profane his holy name."<sup>1</sup>

"God will not dwell in a filthy place, his house must be pure and holy: whatsoever cometh near him must be sanctified."<sup>2</sup>

(It is interesting to note that in the second of the passages quoted above Calvin uses the words 'holiness' and 'majesty' interchangeably, and he does so when speaking of God's ethical holiness. This furnishes us with another fine example of the contention which we made at the beginning of this chapter, viz. that the 'majesty' of God is to Calvin charged with ethical content.)

The 'righteousness' of God, says Calvin, is manifested in two ways. It is revealed first of all in the Moral Law. In setting forth the Office and Use of the Moral Law, he contends that the first use of the Law is to exhibit the 'righteousness' of God. The "evidence and testimony of this righteousness are to be seen in the law," and God is robbed of His praise "if we do not subscribe to all his commandments."<sup>3</sup> "A perfect righteousness is set before us in the Law."<sup>4</sup> The Moral Law is "a kind of mirror" which, when a man gazes into it, he sees that he is "an infinite distance from holiness."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Psalms, Vol. I, p. 380

<sup>2</sup> Sermons of M. Luther and J. Calvin, p. 148

<sup>3</sup> Psalms, Vol. V, pp. 18, 19

<sup>4</sup> Inst., I, ii, p. 409

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 412



The 'righteousness' of God is further revealed in the Divine reaction against sin, i.e., in His 'wrath.' God's indignation against sin in all its forms is "like a raging fire, by whose touch all things are devoured and annihilated."<sup>1</sup> To Calvin, the 'wrath' of God is a natural expression of His holiness, and an indispensable element of it. It is God's moral excellence - His absolute purity - which causes Him to move against sin with all the intensity of His Being. Sin cuts God to the quick, for He is absolute 'righteousness' and cannot bear it. If His holiness consisted only in a divinity which is only vague and over-powering mystery, and which bears no essential relation to morality, then He would be indifferent toward sin, and would treat it as non-existent. But because God's holiness consists also in spotless and dynamic 'righteousness', He hates it and is determined to destroy it, together with those ~~who~~ in whom it becomes incarnate.

In conclusion, we may say that in John Calvin's doctrine of God we are face to face with a God Who cares more for right conduct in His creatures than for anything else. Calvin's God desires more than man's worship and adoration - He demands moral obedience. And it was this fundamentally ethical conception of the Divine nature which gave to the great reformer such a flaming zeal for righteous-

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<sup>1</sup> Inst., II, iii, p. 629

ness and goodness in his own life and in the lives of others. His doctrine of the ethical holiness of God accounts for the tremendous moral force of the man. It is responsible for the severity of his morality, the harshness of his censures, and the stiffness of his ethical demands on individuals and on society as a whole. "Zeal for righteousness was as a burning fire in Calvin's bones, and the supreme purpose of his life was to procure its realization in himself and in society."<sup>1</sup> Dr. Robert Fruin has pointed out that Calvinism came into the Netherlands "impelled by a severely moral sense, and as enthusiastic for the moral as for the religious reformation of mankind."<sup>2</sup> And another authority has said:<sup>3</sup> "Calvinism...demands the strictest morality. It teaches that believers are bound to be holy as God is holy, and pure as He is pure." This is true, and the explanation lies in Calvin's interpretation of divine holiness as being basically moral.

As Calvin felt called upon to vindicate and defend the 'majesty' of God against intrusion and irreverence by seeking to eradicate and punish all idolatry, blasphemy and heresy, so also he sought to vindicate and defend the 'righteousness' of God by demanding purity of life in individual and corporate life. Calvin's ethical passion was like "a consuming fire" within him. Every deviation from

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<sup>1</sup> Hunter, The Teachings of Calvin, p. 4

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by A. Kuyper, Lectures on Calvinism, p. 8

<sup>3</sup> Reyburn, John Calvin: His Life, Letters and Works,

moral rectitude dishonoured God's 'righteousness', and Calvin was out to resist it. The moral law was God's righteousness displayed, and whenever the moral law was infringed, the honour of God's holiness was insulted.

The establishment of the Genevan theocracy (more properly bibliocracy) was the result of Calvin's vision of the intense ethical holiness of God, and of his effort to vindicate and defend it. He aimed at purity of living as well as purity of doctrine. He sought to mold Geneva into a City of God, to establish there an ideal moral society, and there is a sense in which he came near doing it. His success has been the amazement of men. Pattison says in his Essays:<sup>1</sup> "Had Calvin, like Plato, left only a paper sketch of a republic in glowing language and magnificent imagery, how much more would he have been admired by the world. He did much more than describe a virtuous society - he created one." And Dr. Valentine Andreae (1686-1654), a thorough-going Lutheran with the prejudices of an orthodox Lutheran against Calvinism, visited Geneva in 1610, nearly fifty years after Calvin's death, and was astonished at the state of religion and morals in that city. Of this visit he writes:<sup>2</sup> "When I was in Geneva, I observed something great which I shall remember and desire as long as I live. There is in that place not only the perfect institute

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<sup>1</sup> Vol. II, p. 31

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by Schaff, "Swiss Reformation", Vol. II, pp. 518-519

of a perfect republic, but, as a special ornament, a moral discipline, which makes weekly investigations into the conduct, and even the smallest transgressions of the citizens, first through the district inspectors, then through the Seniors, and finally through the magistrates, as the nature of the offence and the hardened state of the offender may require. All cursing and swearing, gambling, luxury, strife, hatred, fraud, etc., are <sup>for-</sup>bidden; while greater sins are hardly heard of. What a glorious ornament of the Christian religion is such a purity of morals."

### Chapter III.

#### MAN'S RESPONSE TO GOD AS HOLY

Having discussed Calvin's doctrine of the holiness of God, it is now proper that we should examine the various feelings and responses which, according to Calvin, this divine holiness evokes in men when they are in its presence. The 'majesty' and 'righteousness' of God which comprise His holiness, create in men such emotional responses as alarm, terror, dread, trembling, awe, humility, amazement, a sense of unworthiness or insignificance, reverence and faith. The character of the feeling-response being determined by the character of a man's relation to the Holy One. If he is a proud man and a sinner he experiences one set of responses; if a humble man and godly he experiences another set of responses.

All men, contends the Reformer, 'fear' the God of holiness and are 'overwhelmed' in the presence of His most glorious 'majesty'. But Calvin is careful to point out that the wicked and the righteous do not experience the same kind of 'fear.' There is an extreme, raw and untempered type of fear or dread which the 'ungodly' alone feel, and which is not experienced by the true Christian believer. The 'fear' which the wicked experience is something altogether different from that 'reverential fear' experienced by the trusting heart. It is a kind of de-

spairing terror which can see in the holiness of God nothing but wrath, punishment and destruction. This differentiation is strikingly illustrated in the following passages:

"Now the pious, while they fear God, are by no means ~~horror~~-struck at his presence, like the reprobates."<sup>1</sup>

"It is according to the measure of his own glory that God ought to be dreaded by the ungodly, in whose destruction he displays his boundless power." "...they ungodly... are forced to tremble when they feel the presence of the wrath of God."<sup>2</sup>

"The wicked...tremble in dismay on hearing of his anger. And they thus dread his anger."<sup>3</sup>

"...the Law, which in itself produces nothing but mere terror."<sup>4</sup>

In a letter to Cardinal Sadoletto, Calvin confesses that he personally experienced the kind of terror which 'the reprobates' feel before he entered experientially into the full meaning of the gospel in Protestantism. In the section of this letter which I quote, Calvin is addressing God:

"When, however, I had performed all these things (confession, good works, sacrifices, and solemn expiations), though I had some intervals of quiet, I was still far off from true peace of conscience; for whenever I descended into myself, or raised my mind to Thee, terror seized me - terror which no expiations or satisfactions could cure."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis, Vol. II, p. 177

<sup>2</sup> Isaiah, Vol. I, p. 110

<sup>3</sup> Inst., II, iii, p. 127 (*italics mine*)

<sup>4</sup> Harmony of the Pent., Vol. I, p. 326

<sup>5</sup> Calvin's Tracts, Vol. I, p. 62



There are then, two types of fear which a vision of the holy God evokes. There is "that forced and servile fear which divine judgment extorts -- judgment which, from the impossibility of escape, they are compelled to dread, by which while they dread, they at the same time also hate;" and there is also "the voluntary fear flowing from reverence of the divine majesty."<sup>1</sup> The 'fear' which the majesty of God evokes in the truly redeemed ones is certainly of this latter type. It is the fear which might more properly be called deep reverence. It is not "an unreasoning horror," nor a "mere dread of punishment." A view of the holiness of God produces in the godly, not abject despair, but "pious submission" rather. Commenting on Genesis 28:17, where it is recorded that Jacob "was afraid," Calvin remarks:<sup>2</sup>

"It seems surprising that Jacob should fear, when God spoke so graciously to him; or that he should call that place 'dreadful', where he had been filled with incredible joy...We are not therefore to understand that Jacob was struck with terror, as reprobates are, as soon as God shows himself; but he was inspired with a fear which produces pious submission."

And commenting on the words, "let him be your fear, and let him be your dread" (Isaiah 8:13), he says:<sup>3</sup>

"Though he speaks not only of fear, but of dread, yet he does not mean that the Jews should be filled with horror at the name

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<sup>1</sup> Inst., I, i, p. 62

<sup>2</sup> Genesis, Vol. II, pp. 116-118 (italics are mine)

<sup>3</sup> Isaiah, Vol. I, pp. 278, 279

of God, so as to desire to flee from him, but merely demands from them reverence for God, and uses both words in order to express continence."

The 'righteous' are not "horror-struck" at a display of the majesty and righteousness of God because Christ has interposed and converted "a throne of dreadful glory into a throne of grace."<sup>1</sup> But it is still a "throne of dreadful glory" to the ungodly because they have spurned God's offer in Christ. The Christian man has a "confidence in God" which enables him to respond not with cringing fear, but with due "reverence." While "the wicked do not fear God from any willingness to offend him," believers "dread the offence even more than the punishment."<sup>2</sup> The fear which the righteous experience is useful in curbing their carnal nature which is always so prone to indulgence. Commenting on Proverbs 28:14, Calvin says:<sup>3</sup>

"The fear he speaks of is that which renders us more cautious, not that which produces despondency; the fear which is felt when the mind confounded in itself resumes its equanimity in God, downcast in itself, takes courage in God, distrusting itself, breathes confidence in God. Hence there is nothing inconsistent in believers being afraid, and at the same time possessing secure consolation."

This is a magnificent passage. Nowhere does Calvin encourage an attitude of jaunty familiarity with the holy God, even on the part of those whose transgressions are

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<sup>1</sup> Inst., II, iii, pp. 477, 478

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 127, 128

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 123

covered, but no one has stressed more than this reformer the glorious release from a despondent fear of God's holiness, which the Gospel provides. Said Jesus: "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you."<sup>1</sup>

Calvin does however, keep constantly before his readers the fact that <sup>the</sup> 'majesty' of God should check our tendency toward an overweening confidence and intimacy. God is never to be conceived of, even by the Christian, as a "good fellow." Indeed, one of the marks of a true believer is his deeply reverent spirit. In the presence of the 'majesty' of God all men - godly as well as ungodly - are "overawed", "over-powered", "reduced to silence", "humbled", "prostrated", and subdued into soberness and reverence. We put down the following passages as examples of these various feeling responses:

"We cannot form any just conception of the character of God, without feeling overawed by his majesty."<sup>2</sup>

"Who would not fall prostrate at the first view of his great majesty? who would not be over-powered by that immeasurable splendour?"<sup>3</sup>

"For what one of the godly will not the majesty of God, in a moment reduce to silence?"<sup>4</sup>

"The majesty of God, which here presents itself conspicuously to view, ought to inspire terror; so that every knee should bow

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<sup>1</sup> John 15:14

<sup>2</sup> Inst., I~~II~~, ii~~II~~, p. 429

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., III, iv, pp. 57, 58

<sup>4</sup> Secret Providence of God, p. 30

to Christ, that all creatures should look up to him and adore him, and that all flesh should keep silence in his presence."<sup>1</sup>

"For, whenever God calls himself Jehovah, it should suggest His majesty, before which all ought to be humbled."<sup>2</sup>

"Wherefore it becomes us to regulate our minds and our tongues, so as never to think or speak of God and his mysteries without reverence and great soberness, and never, in estimating his works, to have any feeling toward him but one of deep veneration."<sup>3</sup>

"...it is a proof of extraordinary madness, if we have no feeling of reverence when the majesty of God is presented to our view."<sup>4</sup>

"...we should prostrate ourselves as suppliants before him when we consider his awful majesty. Not that he would deter worshippers from drawing near to God. They should esteem it their greatest pleasure and enjoyment to seek his face. But he would have us humbled to the right and serious worship of God."<sup>5</sup>

"The book of Job, also, in humbling men under a conviction of their folly, feebleness, and pollution, always derives its chief argument from descriptions of the Divine wisdom, virtue, and purity...we see Abraham the readier to acknowledge himself but dust and ashes the nearer he approaches to behold the glory of the Lord, and Elijah unable to wait with unveiled face for His approach; so dreadful is the sight."<sup>6</sup>

When man contemplates the Providence of God in the government of the world as set forth in the Scriptures, he "bows his head with that awe and reverence, and with that humility, which becomes one standing before such stupendous Majesty!"<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis, Vol. II, p. 114

<sup>2</sup> Harmony of the Pent., Vol. I, p. 343

<sup>3</sup> Inst., I, ii, p. 452

<sup>4</sup> Isaiah, Vol. I, p. 135

<sup>5</sup> Psalms, Vol. IV, p. 55

<sup>6</sup> Inst., I, i, p. 50

<sup>7</sup> Secret Providence of God, p. 7

A sense of the holiness of God had just this effect upon Calvin himself. It produced in him a reverential fear. In all of his writings one senses a spirit and attitude of restraint, humility, and deep reverence. When this great theologian comes to deal with the subject of God, he comes to it with no air of familiarity nor with any coldly scientific or professional spirit. On this point Dr. Warfield says:<sup>1</sup> "As he contemplated the majesty of this Sovereign Father of men, his whole being bowed in reverence before Him, and his whole heart burned with zeal for His glory." Calvin's attitude and spirit when conscious of the presence of the holy God is well expressed in a part of one of his morning prayers appended to the Genevan Catechism:<sup>2</sup>

"My God, my Father and preserver, who by Thy grace towards us hast brought me through the night that is past to this new day, grant that I spend the whole of it in the service and reverent fear of Thy most holy majesty."

Calvin's softening of 'fear' into 'reverence' is due in part to his conviction that the most significant thing about the unrelenting holiness of God is that it is redemptive for those who will turn from their sins and accept the grace which God offers to men in the sacrifice of His Son. Since God's holiness has its redemptive side, men are drawn to it with a believing response. With Cal-

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<sup>1</sup> Calvin and Calvinism, p. 23

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by Hunter, "Teachings of Calvin," p. 210



vin, salvation springs from God's holiness just as truly as it springs from His love. Man's redeemer is "the Holy One." Calvin's critics have made much of the harsh side of his doctrine of God, but have made little if any reference at all to his conception of redemptive holiness which gently attracts men and draws them to God. The following passages will illustrate this idea of redemptive holiness:

"It is expedient, not only that the people should be alarmed by the majesty of God, but also that they should be gently attracted, so that the law might be more precious than gold and silver."<sup>1</sup>

"With what better foundation can it (the Scripture) begin than by reminding us that we must be holy, because 'God is holy?' ...For when we are scattered abroad like lost sheep, wandering through the labyrinth of this world, he brought us back again to his own fold. When mention is made of our union with God, let us remember that holiness must be the bond; not that by the merit of holiness we come into communion with him...but because it greatly concerns his glory not to have <sup>any</sup> fellowship with wickedness and impurity."<sup>2</sup>

The holiness of God then, is, to Calvin, not simply that which condemns, but that which seeks to bestow itself upon the sinner. As Prof. Mackintosh has put it:<sup>3</sup> "...the holiness of God, instead of merely repelling and overwhelming the sinful, frequently becomes the very fact to which the believer fastens his confidence." "It is as

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<sup>1</sup> Harmony of the Penta., Vol. I, p. 339 (italics mine)  
<sup>2</sup> Inst., II, iii, p. 254 (italics mine)  
<sup>3</sup> The Christian Apprehension of God, p. 157



holy that God redeems and keeps men." It is this great truth of a "missionary-hearted" holiness which enables men to respond not only with fear, reverence, and humility, but also with faith and love. We shall see more of this feature of Calvin's idea of holiness when we come to discuss his doctrine of salvation.

## Chapter IV.

### PRACTICAL BEARING OF CALVIN'S DOCTRINE OF HOLINESS ON HIS OTHER DOCTRINES.

John Calvin's conception of God exercised quite naturally and inevitably a profound effect upon all his other doctrines. One recognizes this influence as being quite strong in his views concerning Man, Sin, Salvation, and Prayer. We shall deal briefly with each of these. Consider first, Calvin's doctrine of Man.

#### Doctrine of Man.

Calvin has been called a "God-intoxicated man." So keenly impressed was he with the greatness, the glory, the majesty, the purity, and the righteousness of God, that in comparison man seems utterly insignificant and corrupt. To Calvin, God was everything; man relatively unimportant. "No one," says Dr. Warfield,<sup>1</sup> "has spoken of the majesty of God and the insignificance of man with such feeling and truth as Calvin." Calvin does not seem to think that man's creatureliness, impotence, dependence, impurity, and unworthiness can be overstated. He speaks of "the miserable and abject condition of men,"<sup>2</sup> and declares that "the glory of the Lord is infringed when man glories in himself."<sup>3</sup> Calvin approaches the study of man from the Godward side, or, more properly, his conception of man is

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<sup>1</sup> Calvin and Calvinism, p. 24  
<sup>2</sup> Genesis, Vol. I, p. 490  
<sup>3</sup> Inst., II, iii, p. 345

determined, not by what he sees in man directly, but by what man appears to be when seen through his own conception of God:

"What is there in us? If we cast our eyes upon God, and then enter into a comparison, alas! shall we come near this highness which surmounteth the heavens? Nay, rather can we have any acquaintance with it? For there is nothing but rottenness in us; nothing but sin and death."<sup>1</sup>

When one remembers how high is Calvin's conception of God, he will not wonder at his low view of man. The following brief statements will illustrate the lowly status to which he assigns mere man: "Man who is but rottenness and a worm;"<sup>2</sup> "...mortals who creep like worms on the earth;"<sup>3</sup> "We be poor, frail vessels, and have nothing but corruption and rottenness in us;"<sup>4</sup> "Man is utterly corrupt and depraved, and humility alone becomes him in the presence of God, who is all that he is not;"<sup>5</sup> "We know that there is nothing at all in our nature but wretchedness and misery; nothing but a bottomless pit of stench and infection."<sup>6</sup>

From the references above, it is clear that there are two things in man which impress Calvin: his creatureliness, and his sinfulness. These are the direct opposites of the 'majesty' of God, and the 'righteousness' of God. As God is holy in these two respects, so man is viewed as unholy

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<sup>1</sup> Sermons of M. Luther and J. Calvin, p. 23  
<sup>2</sup> Inst., I, i, p. 50  
<sup>3</sup> Ibid., I, ii, p. 402  
<sup>4</sup> Sermons of M. Luther and J. Calvin, p. 41  
<sup>5</sup> Inst., II, iii, par. 4  
<sup>6</sup> Sermons of M. Luther and J. Calvin, p. 23

because he is, by nature, altogether lacking in each.

Man, says Calvin, does not get a correct view of himself until he contrasts himself with the 'majesty' and the 'righteousness' of God. Pride and self-confidence, an exalted view of oneself, an exaggerated conception of human powers and human righteousness, can always be traced to a faulty or inadequate conception of the being and character of a holy God. Commenting on Genesis 18:27, where Abraham speaks of himself as "dust and ashes," Calvin says:<sup>1</sup>

"For what is mortal man when compared with God?...It is only the brightness of the glory of God which covers with shame and thoroughly humbles men, when stripped of their foolish and intoxicated self-confidence. Whosoever, therefore, seems to himself to be something, let him turn his eyes to God, and immediately he will acknowledge himself to be nothing."

And in the first volume of his commentary on Isaiah, he says:<sup>2</sup>

"...until God reveal himself to us, we do not think that we are men, or rather, we think that we are gods; but when we have seen God, we then begin to feel and know what we are. So when God draws near to us, he brings light with him, that we may perceive our ~~un~~worthlessness, which we could not formerly see, while we entertained a false opinion of ourselves."

In his Institutes, Calvin says<sup>3</sup> that "...men are never duly touched and impressed with a conviction of their insignificance, until they have contrasted themselves with the majesty

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis, Vol. I, pp. 489,490 (italics mine)

<sup>2</sup> Isaiah, Vol. I, p. 208

<sup>3</sup> Inst., I, i, p. 50

of God." The following quotation, taken from Calvin's Institutes, is lengthy, but it exemplifies so well his view of man, and the principle of comparison by which this view is arrived at, that it seemed wise to include it all:<sup>1</sup>

"It is evident that man never attains to a true self-knowledge until he has previously contemplated the face of God, and come down after such contemplation to look into himself. (For (such is our innate pride) we always seem to ourselves just, and upright, and wise, and holy, until we are convinced, by clear evidence, of our injustices, vileness, folly, and impurity. Convinced, however, we are not, if we look at ourselves only, and not to the Lord also - He being the only standard by the application of which this conviction can be produced. For, since we are all naturally prone to hypocrisy, any empty semblance of righteousness is quite enough to satisfy us instead of righteousness itself. And since nothing appears within us or around us that is not tainted with very great impurity, so long as we keep our mind within the confines of human pollution, anything which is in some small degree less defiled delights us as if it were most pure; just as an eye, to which nothing but black had been previously presented, deems an object of a whitish, or even a brownish hue, to be perfectly white...If, at mid-day, we either look down to the ground, or on the surrounding objects which lie open to our view, we think ourselves endued with a very strong and piercing eyesight; but when we look up to the sun, and gaze at it unveiled, the sight which did excellently well for the earth is instantly so dazzled and confounded by the refulgence, as to oblige us to confess that our acuteness in discerning terrestrial objects is mere dimness when applied to the sun. Thus, too, it happens in estimating our spiritual qualities. So long as we do not look beyond the earth, we are quite pleased with our own righteousness, wisdom, and virtue; we address ourselves in the most flattering terms, and seem only less than demigods. But should we once begin to

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<sup>1</sup> Inst., I, i, pp. 48,49



raise our thoughts to God, and reflect what kind of Being he is, and how absolute the perfection of that righteousness, and wisdom, and virtue, to which, as a standard, we are bound to be conformed, what formerly delighted us by its false show of righteousness will become polluted with the greatest iniquity; what strangely imposed upon us under the name of wisdom will disgust by its extreme folly; and what presented the appearance of virtuous energy will be condemned as the most miserable impotence. So far are those qualities in us, which seem most perfect, from corresponding to the divine purity."

We must not conclude however, that Calvin's view of man is identical with that of some of our present-day thinkers like Mr. Bertrand Russell who make man a mere animal, a mere heaping together of material substances. Calvin grants that there is a degree of worthy and dignity in man. The very fact that God seeks his fellowship and sent His only begotten Son to redeem him, is evidence enough that human personality is precious in His sight. This is brought out clearly in his Institutes:<sup>1</sup>

"...man has been reduced to nothing -- man is nothing. And yet how is he whom God exalts utterly nothing? How is he nothing to whom a divine heart has been given? Let us breathe again, brethren. Although we are nothing in our hearts, perhaps something of us may lurk in the heart of God. O Father of mercies! O Father of the miserable! how plantest thou thy heart in us? Where thy heart is, there is thy treasure also."

But the degree of worth and dignity which is present in man is unimpressive when contrasted with the holiness of

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<sup>1</sup> Inst., II, iii, p. 126



God. And furthermore, if man is exalted, it is God Who has exalted him. In his treatise on the Secret Providence of God, Calvin asserts that "man is the noblest work of God;"<sup>1</sup> but this fact furnishes no cause for boasting, for, since man is the work of God, his nobility is but the nobility of a creature, nothing more. Man is nothing apart from God, and is wholly and continuously dependent upon Him for salvation and for the very breath of life itself. In the first section of his Institutes, Calvin says:<sup>2</sup>

"...it is perfectly obvious, that the endowments which we possess cannot possibly be from ourselves; nay, that our very being is nothing else than subsistence in God alone."

When one reads the great sections in Calvin's writings which set forth his conception of man, he is reminded of those familiar lines in Charles Wesley's famous hymn:

"Just and holy is Thy name;  
I am all unrighteousness;  
False and full of sin I am,  
Thou art full of truth and grace."

### Doctrine of Sin

Sin, according to Calvin, is essentially rebellion against God in His 'majesty' and 'righteousness.' It is more than transgression. It is the refusal of the Divine Will. It is "contempt of God."<sup>3</sup> To be sure, overt acts of transgression are sin, but the thing which makes them sin

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<sup>1</sup> Calvin's Calvinism, II, p. 5  
<sup>2</sup> Inst., I, i, pp. 47, 48  
<sup>3</sup> Isaiah, Vol. I, p. 278

in the sight of God is that they are outward manifestations of this inward rebellion against Him, and against His will. It is God's law that we violate. Moral uncleanness and impurity are wrong, not simply because of the ruinous consequences which they bring about in the life of the sinner and in the lives of his fellowmen, but because they are acts of disobedience. The distinctive quality of sin lies principally in its antagonism to the will of the holy God, rather than in its antagonism to the welfare of the sinner or of society. As it has been put in the Bible, "Against thee, thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight."<sup>1</sup> "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight."<sup>2</sup>

Sin is the preference of self to God. It is that spirit, that intention, that attitude which, in its practical outworking, seeks to push God from His throne and usurp His 'majesty.' Instead of making God the centre of his life, and surrendering himself unconditionally to His holy will, the sinner makes self the centre of his life, and sets up his own will as the supreme rule of his life. Sin, essentially, is selfish refusal to submit to God, to obey and trust Him. Sin means putting oneself above God and His will. And to do that is to offend and insult God's 'majesty.'

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 51:4

<sup>2</sup> Luke 15:21

The tragedy of sin, according to Calvin, lies in the fact that it is an affront to the divine majesty, a dishonour inflicted upon God. Through sin "the glory of his divinity is diminished or obscured."<sup>1</sup> And to "offend or impair" the divine majesty is "an inexpressible crime."<sup>2</sup> Calvin laid the emphasis, not upon what sin does to human personality, but upon what it does to tarnish God's glory and offend his holiness. This great reformer was concerned above all else with the honour of God's glorious majesty, and of His moral law.

Sin too, is the refusal of a relationship which satisfies the demands of the transcendent God. When a man is in wrong relation to God, he is a sinner. As Professor Brunner has said,<sup>3</sup> "Sin means that I am in wrong relation to God and that I have torn myself away from an original divinely given possibility." Man is a sinner because of his failure to be and do. It is, in the language of the Westminster Shorter Catechism, "any want of conformity unto" the will and purpose of God. It is failure to reverence and fear Him. It is the omission of devotion and service to Him. It is to be "destitute of His spirit."<sup>4</sup> Sin is "ungodliness":

"Under ungodliness I include...irreligious contempt of God...Although they have some

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<sup>1</sup> Inst., I, ii, p. 445

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., I, i, p. 166

<sup>3</sup> The Theology of Crisis, p. 54

<sup>4</sup> Inst., II, iii, p. 605

profession of religion, yet they never fear and reverence God sincerely and honestly, but, on the contrary, have consciences that are useless, so that nothing is further from their thoughts than that they ought to serve God."<sup>1</sup>

There are, indeed, points of similarity between Calvin's doctrine of sin, and that of Anselm. It is Anselm's contention that sin consists in the creature's withholding from God the honour and worship and obedience which is His due.

Sin as transgression is a violation of the 'righteousness' of God; sin as a refusal to conform to the Divine will is a violation of the 'majesty' of God. And since the vindication of God's holiness was the passion of Calvin's life, it is not difficult to see why this man believed with all his soul in the awful sinfulness of sin. Sin was to him not error, or misfortune, or finiteness, or ignorance, or infirmity, or arrested development, or man's inheritance from a brute ancestry. Sin was an arrogant insult to the divine holiness. Sin was open and wilful rebellion against the living God. Calvin never underestimated, he never understated the gravity of sin. In his Institutes he speaks of the "grievous heinousness of sin."<sup>2</sup> Sin is so grave, so destructive, so unlike God, so dishonouring to the divine holiness, that there are no words adequate to describe it,

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<sup>1</sup> Commentary on Timothy, Titus, & Philemon, p. 319

<sup>2</sup> Inst., II, iii, p. 217

and no recompense too severe. God "will be the avenger of his insulted majesty."<sup>1</sup> Sin deserves temporal and eternal punishment:

"Therefore, it should not seem absurd when we say that death is the just recompense of every sin, because each sin merits the just indignation and vengeance of God."<sup>2</sup>

"Sins are temporal, they say; I confess it, but the majesty of God which they have offended is eternal. It is then quite right that the memory of their iniquity should not perish. But if it is so, they say, the corruption surpasses the measure of their sin. I reply that that is an unutterable blasphemy, when the majesty of God is of so little account with us that we think less of its being despised than of the perdition of a soul."<sup>3</sup>

Sin is grievously heinous, not only because it insults God's 'majesty', but also because it is repugnant to His 'righteousness' - because between His perfect righteousness and man's iniquity "there is a perpetual and irreconcilable repugnance:"

"For God, who is perfect righteousness, cannot love the iniquity which he sees in all. All of us, therefore, have that within which deserves the hatred of God. Hence, in respect, first, of our corrupt nature; and, secondly, of the depraved conduct following upon it, we are all offensive to God, guilty in his sight, and by nature the children of hell...there is a perpetual and irreconcilable repugnance between righteousness and iniquity."<sup>4</sup>

No theologian has ever given sin a blacker name than Calvin, for no theologian has ever had a more exalted view

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<sup>1</sup> Inst., I, ii, p. 432  
<sup>2</sup> Ibid., II, iii, p. 427  
<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 616

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., I, ii, p. 50



of the character of God. His conception of the intense holiness of God made it impossible for him to see any good in man. It also compelled him to view sin as nothing short of heinous and abominable crime. Calvin's conception of sin was certainly coloured, and to a high degree, determined, by his conception of God's 'majesty' and 'righteousness.'

### Doctrine of Salvation

We have seen that, according to Calvin's view, sin is a terrific and devastating fact - a fact which has created a wide gulf between God and man. But, says Calvin, God is not satisfied to have this condition existing. It greatly concerns Him that He does not have fellowship with the unrighteous. God in His holiness desires to abolish sin and save men from their iniquity. In Calvin's view, it is of the very essence of true holiness that it cannot be indifferent to the presence of unholiness anywhere, and cannot be satisfied until the un-holy has been made holy. It is this fact which explains and undergirds the offer of redemption in the gospel. As has been indicated elsewhere, the holiness of God is "missionary hearted." Notwithstanding our treachery, God has given Himself to us in lovingkindness. In Calvin's words, God "is anxious about the salvation of men."<sup>1</sup> Holiness, by its very nature, is forever seeking to communicate itself to unholy men. The holy God is out seek-

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah, Vol. IV, p. 213



ing the sinner. He is, in Frances Thompson's unique phrase, "The Hound of Heaven."<sup>1</sup> There is a passage in M'Leod Campbell's The Nature of the Atonement, which brings out this feature of God's holiness most clearly.<sup>2</sup> Dr. Campbell states that the sinner might well say to himself, "Surely the divine righteousness desires to see me righteous -- the divine holiness desires to see me holy -- my continuing unrighteous~~ness~~ and unholy is as grieving to God's righteousness and holiness as my misery through sin is to His pity and love." The holiness of God becomes then, the ground of His redemptive grace. Men are saved from their ungodliness and unrighteousness, not in spite of God's holiness, but because of it. In Calvin it is not "a righteous God and yet a Saviour," but "a righteous God, and therefore a Saviour."

Returning again to Dr. M'Leod Campbell, he has called our attention to two views of the holiness of God: "In one view it repels the sinner, and would banish him to outer darkness, because of its repugnance to sin. In another it is pained by the continued existence of sin and unholiness, and must desire that the sinner should cease to be sinful. So that the sinner, conceived of as awakening to the consciousness of his own evil state, and saying to himself, 'By sin I have destroyed myself. Is there yet hope for me

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<sup>1</sup> Dodd, Mead & Co., 1925  
<sup>2</sup> p. 26

in God?' should hear an encouraging answer, not only from the love and mercy of God, but also from his very righteousness and holiness." Now of these two views, we believe that Calvin certainly held to the latter. This glorious and spotless holiness which abhors sin, which moves against it with all the righteous wrath of absolute purity, is more than man's dread. It is man's one hope of redemption from the power and consequences of his sin. God cares about our unholy condition, and because He cares - because He is not indifferent to sin - He provides an atonement that we might not be forever estranged from Him. One cannot read Calvin's works without noticing that he delights in the "divine initiative" of the holy God.

And now, let us come directly to Calvin's doctrine of Salvation. A holy God cannot bear iniquity. He demands therefore, that men be holy even as He is holy. But man is powerless, because of his weakness and sinful nature, to attain to a holiness that can abide the presence of the "spotless purity of God." The holiness which God requires of men is absolute. Man's best efforts therefore, fall far short. Our best is an abomination in His sight:

"If everything which our mind conceives, meditates, plans, and resolves, is always evil, how can it ever think of doing what is pleasing to God, to whom righteousness and holiness alone are acceptable."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Inst., I, ii, p. 329

"All the righteousness of men collected into one heap would be inadequate to compensate for a single sin."<sup>1</sup>

"...for even could a man satisfy the Law, he could not stand the scrutiny of that righteousness which transcends all our thoughts."<sup>2</sup>

The above words of Calvin reminds one of these sentences from the pen of Prof. Karl Barth: "There is no human righteousness by which men can escape the wrath of God. There is no magnificent temporality of this world which can justify men before God. There is no arrangement of affairs, or deportment of behaviour, no disposition of mind or depth of feeling, no intuition or understanding, which is by its own virtue pleasing to God."<sup>3</sup>

And the holiness which God demands must be a real holiness, and not a vain pretence. It must be a genuine holiness of the inner life. No outward piety which is all of appearance and indulges in religious ceremonies as an evasion of the ethical requirements of God, can satisfy Him. As in the Old Testament prophets, it is not holy offerings by a holy priesthood in a holy temple that is wanted primarily, but holy character. It is not enough to serve God by "outward ceremonies." Men must "live uprightly." "...the outward mask of holiness or uprightness is of no avail in his presence."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Inst., II, iii, p. 365

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 335

<sup>3</sup> Romans (E.T.), p. 56

<sup>4</sup> Calvin: Commentary on Isaiah, Vol. I, p. 377

"There is nothing which God more abominates than when men endeavour to cloak themselves by substituting signs and external appearance for integrity of heart."<sup>1</sup>

"Although men may torment themselves with ceremonies and outward performances, yet all these things are vain, until they become upright in heart....We see then that all the services we can perform, until we are truly reformed in our hearts, are but mockeries; and God condemneth and rejecteth every whit of them."<sup>2</sup>

That is to say, the holiness which God requires of His creatures must be something other than mechanical. Outward moral rectitude cannot suffice. We must be clean in thought as well as in act. "Thou desirest truth in the inward parts."<sup>3</sup> The holiness which alone can meet divine approval must be one which extends to what Hawthorne has called, the "never perpetrated sins" of the mind,<sup>4</sup> to "the meditations of my heart" as well as to "the words of my mouth."<sup>5</sup>

"A human lawgiver does not extend his care beyond outward order, and, therefore, his injunctions are not violated without outward acts. But God, whose eye nothing escapes, and who regards not the outward appearance so much as purity of heart, under the prohibition of murder, adultery, and theft, includes wrath, hatred, lust, covetousness, and all other things of a similar nature. Being a spiritual Lawgiver, he speaks to the soul, not less than the body. The murder which the soul commits is wrath and hatred; the theft, covetousness and avarice; and the adultery, lust."<sup>6</sup>

Since man in his sinfulness and weakness is unable of himself to provide a quality of character which is satis-

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<sup>1</sup> Inst., iii, iv, p. 264

<sup>2</sup> Sermons of M. Luther and J. Calvin, pp. 77, 78

<sup>3</sup> Psalm 51:6

<sup>4</sup> ~~Twice Told Tales~~ Twice Told Tales, p. 163

<sup>5</sup> Psalm 19:14

<sup>6</sup> Inst., i, ii, p. 435

factory to a holy God, this righteousness or holiness must needs come to him as an out and out gift. And since God alone is 'holy', He alone is qualified to offer this gift to men. "God alone," says Calvin, "is the fountain of righteousness."<sup>1</sup> He is "the only source of all virtue, justice, holiness, wisdom, truth, power, goodness, mercy, life, and salvation."<sup>2</sup> The only righteousness which is regarded as acceptable to God, the only righteousness which the people of God can obtain in this life, comes by imputation. Holiness is "bestowed." Men are made righteous when God imputes to them His own holiness. And his holiness is instilled into our souls by the Holy Spirit.<sup>3</sup> Though not righteous in ourselves "we are deemed righteous." "...holiness of life, real holiness, as it is called, is inseparable from the free imputation of righteousness."<sup>4</sup> God in Christ "transfers the benefit of his holiness to others."<sup>5</sup> "...every degree of purity, piety, holiness, and justice, which we possess, is his gift." God, in His mercy, regards us as righteous and innocent.<sup>6</sup> We are "justified by faith." Writing on justification, Calvin says:<sup>7</sup>

"Thus we simply interpret justification, as the acceptance with which God receives us into his favour as if we were righteous; and we say that this justification consists in the forgiveness of sins and the imputation of the righteousness of Christ."

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<sup>1</sup> Inst., II, iii, p. 312

<sup>2</sup> Tracts, Vol. I, p. 127

<sup>3</sup> Inst., II, iii, p. 159

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., II, iii, p. 151

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., II, ii, p. 81

<sup>6</sup> Inst., III, iv, p. 356

<sup>7</sup> Inst., II, iii, p. 303



It is Jesus, the God-Man, the Sinless One, Who supplies the bond which unites an unutterably holy God and sinful men. It is only in Christ that we can fellowship with a 'holy' God. In Calvin's words, "Christ must intervene."<sup>1</sup> Without Him "our condition" is "miserable and calamitous."<sup>2</sup>

"...without Christ God is in a manner hostile to us, and has his arm raised for our destruction."<sup>3</sup>

"...without Jesus Christ, his majesty will always be terrible and fearful to us."<sup>4</sup>

We can only approach the dreadful majesty of a holy God "clothed with his holiness."<sup>5</sup> We are accepted in Him alone. In the death of Christ satisfaction is given to divine justice, the curse is removed, the penalty for sin paid, and we are reconciled to God. Jesus bore the weight of the divine anger. God is appeased by the death of His Son, and is made propitious to us. Because of His propitiatory death for us Christ is our Mediator, the "link"<sup>6</sup> between God's majesty and man:

"Our Lord Jesus Christ communicates his righteousness to us...we conceal ourselves under the precious purity of Christ, our first-born brother, that we may obtain an attestation of righteousness from the presence of God."<sup>7</sup>

"...the free goodness with which the Father embraces us in Christ when he clothes us with the innocence of Christ, and accepts it as ours, so that in consideration of it he regards us as holy, pure, and innocent."<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Inst., II, iii, p. 96

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., II, ii, p. 49

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 50

<sup>4</sup> Sermons of M. Luther and J. Calvin, p. 49

<sup>5</sup> Inst., II, ii, p. 45

<sup>6</sup> Sermons of J. Calvin, p. 26

<sup>7</sup> Inst., II, iii, p. 332

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 364



"For the Son of God, though spotlessly pure, took upon him the disgrace and ignominy of our iniquities, and in return clothed us with his purity."<sup>1</sup>

"...as a Mediator, free from all taint, he may by his own holiness procure the favour of God for us...there is no access to God for us or for our prayers until the priest, purging away our defilements, sanctify us, and obtain for us the favour of which the impurity of our lives and hearts deprives us."<sup>2</sup>

Man's salvation then, is wholly dependent upon the "divine initiative." We should have perished if God had not come to us. It is He Who makes the first move. A great gulf has been fixed between God and man because of man's unholiness ("...there is a great distance between him and us."<sup>3</sup>), and it can only be crossed from the other side. As Professor Karl Barth has put it: "Forgiveness always takes the way from God to man and never otherwise."<sup>4</sup> When "Christ interposed," says Calvin, man was "estranged from God by sin, an heir of wrath, exposed to the curse of eternal death, excluded from all hope of salvation, a complete alien from the blessing of God, the slave of Satan, captive under the yoke of sin; in fine, doomed to horrible destruction, and already involved in it."<sup>5</sup>

It is the teaching of Calvin that if man is so un-

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<sup>1</sup> Inst., II, iii, p. 55

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., II, ii, pp. 43, 45

<sup>3</sup> Isaiah, Vol. IV, p. 212

<sup>4</sup> The Word of God, p. 181

<sup>5</sup> Inst., II, ii, p. 49

worthy, so unclean as to offend the holy majesty of God; if sin is so heinous, so divisive, so destructive of any fellowship with the Eternal, if sin creates a great chasm between God and sinning men, then we must look to God for the initial step toward a relationship. If He wants us for Himself, then He must move in our direction before we can move in His. And this is precisely what God does. He wants us for Himself, and He comes near to us in the person of His only begotten Son.

"...the whole and undivided cause of salvation must be ascribed to God, and...no part of it can be attributed to another without deſestable ſacrilege."<sup>1</sup>

"He had no regard to our persons, neither to our worthiness, nor to any deserts that we could possibly bring. Before we were born, we were enrolled in his register; he had already adopted us for his children. Therefore let us yield the whole ~~of~~ to his mercy, knowing that we cannot boast of ourselves, unless we rob him of the honour which belongs to him."<sup>2</sup>

Salvation therefore, is wholly a work of God in man's behalf. Man can do nothing to call it forth or make it operative. It is a work of God's free grace alone. Man cannot save himself, neither can he help God any in the saving process. Men vaunt themselves when they think that they are the cause of their own salvation. How "marvelously mistaken" we are "when we think we have some worthiness of

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah, Vol. II, p. 393

<sup>2</sup> Sermons of M. Luther and J. Calvin, p. 46

our own, and exalt our deserts to darken God's grace."<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Warfield has this to say about this feature of Calvin's soteriology: "What lies at the heart of his soteriology is the absolute exclusion of the creaturely element in the initiation of the saving process, that so the pure grace of God may be magnified. Only so could he express his sense of man's complete dependence as sinner on the free mercy of a saving God; or extrude the evil leaven of Synergism by which...God is robbed of His glory and man is encouraged to think that he owes to some power, some act of choice, some initiative of his own, his participation in that salvation which is in reality all of grace. There is nothing against which Calvinism sets its face with more firmness than every form and degree of autosoterism."<sup>2</sup>

### Doctrine of Prayer

Calvin's doctrine of prayer is principally contained in the second volume of his Institutes, the twentieth chapter, where he gives a general discourse on the subject, followed by a rather full treatment of the Lord's Prayer. His conception of the holy character of God had a marked influence upon his thought about prayer, particularly as regards the attitudes one should assume when in communion with the Eternal.

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<sup>1</sup> Sermons of M. Luther and J. Calvin, p. 42  
<sup>2</sup> Calvin and Calvinism, pp. 359, 360

It is possible, says Calvin, for man to go to God in prayer even though he is abominable and revolting in His sight. This is a marvelous privilege, and really unthinkable that a holy God should grant this right to frail and iniquitous men. Nevertheless, it is true. God has not only invited us to bring our petitions to Him, but commanded us. For did He not say in Psalm 91:15, "Call upon me in the day of trouble?" "God," says Calvin, "is robbed of his holiness when we do not immediately betake ourselves to him in cases of perplexity."<sup>1</sup> Not to pray therefore, is with Calvin an act of dishonour and disobedience. Prayerlessness robs God of His holiness.

We must never lose sight of the fact however, that communion with a God Who is absolute holiness would be impossible were it not for His marvelous condescension. Calvin speaks of God "condescendingly inviting us to disburden our cares into his bosom."<sup>2</sup> "Our heavenly Father...condescendingly allures us to himself."<sup>3</sup> "It were presumption to go forward into the presence of God, did he not anticipate us by his invitation."<sup>4</sup> "Our most merciful Father will not reject those whom he not only encourages to come, but urges in every possible way."<sup>5</sup> "There is no prayer which God would not deservedly disdain, did he not overlook the blemishes

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah, Vol. I, p. 278

<sup>2</sup> Inst., II, iii, p. 455

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 467

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 468

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 471

with which all of them are polluted."<sup>1</sup> Commenting on I. Timothy 2:8 ("I will therefore that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting."), Calvin says:<sup>2</sup>

"Until God hath called us, we cannot come to him without too much impudent boldness. Is it not rashness for mortal man to presume to address himself to God? Therefore we must wait till God calleth us, which he also doth by his word."

But while God invites and urges us to come to Him in prayer, we dare not come except as we come in the Name of Christ. We must come robed in His righteousness, and claiming no merit of our own. Christ is our High Priest and Advocate Who intercedes for us, and God hears only the prayers that are offered through the mediation of His dear Son. Jesus is the only way and the only access by which a man may draw near to God. Those who decline this access and deviate from this way, have no other recourse. To them the throne of the holy God presents nothing but wrath, judgment, and terror. No prayer is acceptable to God which Jesus as Mediator does not sanctify:

"There is no access to God for us or for our prayers until the priest, purging away our defilements, sanctify us, and obtain for us that favour of which the impurity of our lives and hearts deprives us."<sup>3</sup>

"But since no man is worthy to come forward in his own name, and appear in the

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<sup>1</sup> Inst., II, iii, p. 477

<sup>2</sup> Sermons of M. Luther and J. Calvin, p. 172

<sup>3</sup> Inst., II, iii, p. 44



presence of God, our heavenly Father, to relieve us at once from fear and shame, with which all must feel oppressed, has give us his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, to be our Advocate and Mediator, that under his guidance we may approach securely, confiding that with him for our Intercessor nothing which we ask in his name will be denied us, as there is nothing which the Father can deny to him...As the promise gives us Christ as our Mediator, so unless our hope of obtaining what we ask is founded on him, it deprives us of the privilege of prayer. For it is impossible to think of the dread majesty of God without being filled with alarm; and hence the sense of our own unworthiness must keep us far away, until Christ interpose, and convert a throne of dreadful glory into a throne of grace; as the Apostle teaches that thus we can 'come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.'<sup>1</sup>

"...we are all excluded from the face of God, and, therefore, there is need of a Mediator to appear in our name, and carry us on his shoulders, and keep us bound upon his breast, that we may be heard in his person; and, secondly, that our prayers, which, as has been said, would otherwise never be free from impurity are cleansed by the sprinkling of his blood."<sup>2</sup>

Those who approach the holy God through the mediatorship of Jesus Christ should not do so shrinkingly or timidly. Their approach should be characterized by 'boldness.' For, do we not go fortified by His invitations? Those who come near to God in prayer should stand upon their feet and confidently claim the privileges of sonship, and all the blessings which God has promised to His elect children.

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<sup>1</sup> Inst., II, iii, pp. 477, 478

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 478



There should be no groveling in the dust. We are not to "pray timorously." To do so is to cast doubt on God's wonderful provision for our coming to Him:

"God is ready to receive us, although we be not worthy: when we once know his will, we may come to him with boldness, because he maketh himself familiar to us."<sup>1</sup>

"A bold spirit in prayer well accords with fear, reverence, and anxiety, and there is no inconsistency when God raises up those who have fallen prostrate."<sup>2</sup>

"The special benefit of these promises we receive when we frame our prayer, not timorously or doubtingly, but when trusting to his word whose majesty might otherwise deter us, we are bold to call him Father, he himself deigning to suggest this most delightful name."<sup>3</sup>

"The whole body of the Israelites, whenever they fortify themselves with the remembrance of the covenant, plainly declare, that since God thus prescribes they are not to pray timorously."<sup>4</sup>

But while we are to come to God boldly, we are not to approach God's throne with presumptuous assurance. Our boldness must never be "impudent boldness." Boldness which is not characterized by true reverence amounts to arrogance, and arrogance in God's presence is rank sin. When we go into the presence of the Holy One our attitude should always be one of deep humility and reverence. We are not to pray to God as if we "were conversing with one like our-

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<sup>1</sup> Sermons of M. Luther and J. Calvin, p. 172

<sup>2</sup> Inst., II, iii, p. 471

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 470

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 471

selves."<sup>1</sup> Calvin encourages intimacy with God, but never familiarity. And this intimacy which the believer enjoys must never lose its filial awe; it must never be permitted to sink into carelessness and irreverence. Calvin would agree that God is a Great Friend, but to act toward our Creator as if He were "a particular pal" would be abhorrent to him. We profane the name of God - we blaspheme His holiness when we rush into His divine presence in a presumptuous or flippant manner:

"Though believers, persuaded of the paternal love of God, cheerfully rely on his faithfulness, and have no hesitation in imploring the aid which he voluntarily offers, they are not elated with supine or presumptuous security; but climbing up by the ladder of the promises, still remain humble and abased suppliants."<sup>2</sup>

"Though prayer is the familiar intercourse of believers with God, yet reverence and modesty must be observed."<sup>3</sup>

"He who comes into the presence of God to pray must divest himself of all vain-glorious thoughts, lay aside all idea of worth; in short, discard all self-confidence, humbly giving God the whole glory, lest by arrogating any thing, however little, to himself, vain pride cause him to turn away his face."<sup>4</sup>

Man's approach to a prayer hearing God should always be marked by real repentance and confession, and by a sincere desire for pardon. To come in any other spirit or at-

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<sup>1</sup> Inst., II, iii, p. 455

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 472

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 475

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 460

titude is to "abuse His great condescension."<sup>1</sup> "One of the requisites of legitimate prayer is repentance." "In fine, supplication for pardon, with humble and ingenious confession of guilt forms both the preparation and commencement of right prayer."<sup>2</sup> Calvin's teaching regarding boldness in prayer is well illustrated by the story about the portals to the ancient castle. Over the first gate were the words, "Be bold;" over the second, "Be bold, be bold;" over the third, "Be bold, be bold, and evermore be bold;" but over the castle door itself, "Be not too bold."<sup>3</sup>

According to Miss Jane Stoddart, John Calvin realized this ideal of reverential boldness in his own personal prayer life. She says:<sup>4</sup> "In Calvin's prayer the ardour of religious emotion is controlled by a reverent realization of the unapproachable majesty of a holy God."

Not only does God's holiness require a boldness which is reverential, but when a man enters into communion with God he must see to it that the things which he brings to God in prayer are in keeping with His character, and such as He can, in agreement with His holiness, consider:

"For not only do many without modesty, without reverence, presume to invoke God concerning their frivolities, but impudently bring forward their dreams...before the tribunal of God...they have the

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<sup>1</sup> Inst., II, iii, p. 455

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 459, 461

<sup>3</sup> Vance, Worship God, p. 96

<sup>4</sup> Private Prayer in Christian Story, p. 129

hardihood to obtrude upon God desires so vile, that they would blush exceedingly to impart them to their fellow men."<sup>1</sup>

And further, prayers which do not issue from the heart offend the 'majesty' of God. "Vain repetitions" are abominable in the sight of the Holy One:

"Nay, rather, they provoke his anger against us, if they come from the lips and throat only, since this is to abuse his sacred name, and hold his majesty in derision."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Inst., II, iii, pp. 455, 456  
<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 499

SECTION II.

OTTO'S DOCTRINE OF THE HOLINESS OF GOD

Chapter V.

THE CATEGORY OF THE NUMINOUS

Professor Rudolf Otto's doctrine of the holiness of God is principally contained in his book, Das Heilige ('The Idea of the Holy'), and in his Aufsätze Das Numinose Betreffend ('Essays Concerning the Numinous'). These essays have been translated into English, part of which have been published as appendices to the fourth impression of The Idea of the Holy, and part in a separate volume entitled, Religious Essays, A supplement to 'The Idea of the Holy'.

Prof. Otto's book, Das Heilige, was published in 1917, and almost overnight attracted serious attention in the theological circles of Germany and Britain. Reprintings and translations of this scholarly work appeared rapidly, so that in the course of ten or twelve years Das Heilige had been translated into seven languages, and had gone through a number of re-editions and twenty-four reprintings in Germany, and as many as five reprintings in its English translation.

The popularity which this book has enjoyed indicates that Prof. Otto had something to say on the subject of holiness which merited thoughtful consideration. Here was a striking treatment of holiness toward which no theologian could afford to be indifferent. Such leading scholars in



Great Britain as Prof. Hugh Mackintosh, of New College, Edinburgh, and Prof. John Oman, of Cambridge, have found Otto's treatment suggestive, and frequently in their writings they make reference to it.

It is now our purpose to discuss Prof. Otto's doctrine of the holiness of God. As we have already indicated, his views on this subject are almost entirely contained in his The Idea of the Holy, and his Religious Essays. It is essential therefore, that we follow rather closely the development of Prof. Otto's position as it is unfolded in these two volumes.

Prof. Otto starts out with the contention that there is an element in the Divine nature which cannot be expressed by any of the attributes which men ordinarily ascribe to God. In theology the nature of God is generally set forth by means of certain rational concepts. As Dr. Maldwyn Hughes has put it:<sup>1</sup> "A theistic religion, especially Christianity, admits knowledge of the transcendent in terms of conceptual thought." God is Spirit, Reason, Purpose, Good Will, Supreme Power, Unity, Selfhood. Now, Otto does not find fault with such conceptual thinking about God. Indeed, he says:<sup>2</sup>

"Rather we count this the very mark and criterion of a religion's high rank and superior value -- that it should have no

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<sup>1</sup> The Christian Idea of God, p. 65

<sup>2</sup> The Idea of the Holy, p. 1

lack of conceptions about God...This must be asserted at the outset and with the most positive emphasis."<sup>1</sup>

But, granting all this, we are warned that we must guard against assuming that the essence of Deity can be given completely and exhaustively in such rational ascriptions. These attributions, fine and necessary as they are, simply cannot do justice to the quite unique nature of God and the religious consciousness which apprehends Him:

"Religion is not exclusively contained and exhaustively comprised in any series of 'rational' assertions."<sup>2</sup>

The trouble with all such rational concepts, continues Prof. Otto, is that they only imply a 'non-rational' Subject of which they are but predicates. At best, such rational ascriptions are but faint suggestions of a divine essence which the human intellect is incapable of rationalizing:

"They are 'essential' (and not merely 'accidental') attributes of that subject, but they are also, it is important to notice, synthetic essential attributes. That is to say, we have to predicate them of a subject which they qualify, but which in its deeper essence is not, nor indeed can be, comprehended in them."<sup>3</sup>

There is then, an element in the Divine nature which is definitely 'non-rational' in character; an element which

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<sup>1</sup> Thus Otto tries at the very beginning to safeguard himself against the criticisms which his subsequent treatment is certain to evoke.

<sup>2</sup> The Idea of the Holy, p. 3

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 2

cannot be grasped by pure intellect, nor expressed in conceptual language. But (and here is an important distinction), while this non-rational element in the Divine cannot be thought, it can be felt. A man may experience that which he cannot formulate in the mind. He may possess the reality of it intuitively, so to speak.

It ought to be stated in this connection that while the term 'non-rational' or 'irrational' is commonly used in a derogatory sense, Dr. Otto does not so use the word. As Prof. Mackintosh has pointed out:<sup>1</sup> "By 'non-rational' is meant, not the merely incoherent and contradictory, but that which lies beyond the frontier of logical thought, and in which the finite mind is confronted with a limit. 'Extra-rational' is the sense." Occasionally Prof. Otto uses as a synonym for 'non-rational' the term 'supra-rational', which, it seems to us, is a much better one for his purpose.

Prof. Otto sets for himself the task of indicating and analyzing in detail this 'supra-rational' element in the Divine nature, and of emphasizing its vital importance. This, he says, is a task which Orthodoxy has failed to perform, and for this reason it has merited, to some extent at least, the common saying that Orthodoxy is the mother

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<sup>1</sup> Selections from the Literature of Theism, p. 452

of Rationalism. Because of Orthodoxy's failure to appreciate this non-rational side of religion, and to find a way to give it the emphasis which it deserves, it has given an interpretation to the idea of God which is "one-sidedly intellectualistic."

"Orthodoxy found in the construction of dogma and doctrine no way to do justice to the non-rational aspect of its subject. So far from keeping the non-rational element in religion alive in the heart of the religious experience, orthodox Christianity manifestly failed to recognize its value, and by this failure gave to the idea of God a one-sidedly intellectualistic and rationalistic interpretation."<sup>1</sup>

Prof. Otto contends that this 'non-rational' element is a priori in character. And here he reveals his indebtedness to Immanuel Kant and to Jakob Fries, two great German philosophers. Otto finds in the Kantian a priori principle, particularly as modified by Fries, the most satisfying explanation of man's innate religious interest, and of the ability of the human mind to grasp "with the certitude of first-hand insight" that unique element or quality in the Divine nature which defies rational concepts. Of course, Kant had maintained that the moral element was the only genuinely a priori element in religion. But Otto, basing himself on Fries' modification of the a priori principle, widens the use of this principle and contends that religion is as basic in human nature as morality, and

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<sup>1</sup> The Idea of the Holy, p. 3

that there is a 'religious a priori' as well as a 'moral a priori.' This religious a priori has a right to a place alongside the categories of the True, the Good, and the Beautiful. It is "the quite distinctive category."

Prof. Otto goes on to state exactly what this a priori element is: it is the idea of 'the holy' or 'sacred.' There is, in man's awareness of Holiness, an appreciation which is as unique and fundamental as may be seen in his awareness of the Logical, the Moral, and the Aesthetic. We are, however, prevented from calling this a priori element 'the holy' simply because the terms 'holiness' or 'sanctity' are charged with ethical meaning. These terms have unfortunately been used in common parlance, and even in philosophical and theological language, to denote absolute goodness or moral perfection. This is unfortunate because, while it is true that the term 'holy' has moral significance, it includes in addition "a clear overplus of meaning."<sup>1</sup> Indeed, moral goodness was not the original meaning of the term. Originally the term 'holy', or at least its equivalents in the ancient languages, had nothing to do with goodness, but denoted only this 'overplus'. It designated an aspect of experience which transcended the ethical:

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<sup>1</sup> The Idea of the Holy, p. 5



"...if the ethical element was present at all, at any rate it was not original and never constituted the whole meaning of the word."<sup>1</sup>

Now it is this "overplus of meaning" in the idea of 'the holy' which Otto desires to 'isolate', and examine, and emphasize. In order to do this effectively - in order to throw this non-rational element into relief, and avoid confusion in our thinking, it will be necessary to give to this 'extra' in the meaning of 'holy' a new name:

"It will be useful, at least for the temporary purpose of the investigation, to invent a special term to stand for 'the holy' minus its moral factor or 'moment', and, as we can now add, minus its 'rational' aspect altogether."<sup>2</sup>

The term which Prof. Otto adopts for his purpose is the word 'numinous'. It is a word coined from the Latin numen, the general Latin word for supernatural divine power. "Omen has given us ominous, and there is no reason why from numen we should not similarly form a word 'numinous'."<sup>3</sup> Its corresponding expressions in Hebrew, Greek and Latin are: qādôsh, ἅγιος, sanctus. The term numinous is used widely today, and occupies a definite place in modern theological terminology.

We may use the term numinous then, to designate that quality in holiness which is entirely non-rational and

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<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., p. 6

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Op. cit., p. 7



non-ethical. The 'numinous' may be discussed, but it cannot be strictly defined:

"This mental state is perfectly sui generis and irreducible to any other, and therefore, like every absolutely primary and elementary datum, while it admits of being discussed, it cannot be strictly defined."<sup>1</sup>

But when he says that this mental state is perfectly sui generis Dr. Otto does not mean that it cannot be analyzed, for indeed, his very next chapter is entitled, "The Elements in the Numinous." The 'numinous', standing by itself as a purely religious category, is in itself 'ethically neutral.' To use Dr. Mozley's words, it stands for "something which is more than an attribute, however lofty, of God, more even than the totality of moral values."<sup>2</sup>

Prof. Otto does not mean to set the 'numinous' or 'non-rational' element in opposition to the moral. It is above and beyond the moral. 'Holiness' is for him a complex category which covers both the moral and the non-moral elements. Otto does feel however, that we greatly err if we suppose that 'holiness' and 'goodness' are synonymous. The idea of righteousness does not exhaust the content of holiness. Whether Otto makes room for a real moral quality in Divine holiness in his theory is a question which will be discussed later on in this treatise. But whatever may be said on

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<sup>1</sup> The Idea of the Holy, p. 7

<sup>2</sup> The Doctrine of God, p. 66

that point, this much is true: Otto intends no neglect of, no ruling out of, the ethical element. He means only to isolate that 'numinous' quality in holiness which has too frequently been lost sight of.

It is clear that in Prof. Otto's treatment, the 'numinous' and the 'holy' are not equivalents, though at times he does seem to use them interchangeably. The 'numinous' stands only for that residual element in 'holy' which eludes conceptualization; the "indefinable" in the Divine nature. It is the name for that feature of holiness which stands by itself, with a nature all its own, and which cannot be derived from any other fundamental conception such as the good, the true or the beautiful.

It should be noted further, that when Otto uses the term 'numinous' he may be referring to the Object of the religious response, or to the response itself. He speaks of a "unique 'numinous' category of value" and of a "'numinous' state of mind, which is always found wherever the category is applied."<sup>1</sup> As Prof. Mackintosh has expressed it:<sup>2</sup> "The divine reality is numinous, and the devotee feels numinously towards it." And it is not only impossible to express the 'numinous' quality of the divine in conceptual language, but the 'numinous' feeling or experience which the presence of the non-rational element evokes

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<sup>1</sup> The Idea of the Holy, p. 7

<sup>2</sup> Selections from the Literature of Theism, p. 459 (footnote)

or awakens in the worshipper also defies expression. Prof. Otto speaks of "the unutterableness of what has been yet genuinely experienced."<sup>1</sup> Or as Augustine has put it, "the supereminence of the godhead surpasses the power of customary speech. For God is more truly thought than he is uttered."<sup>2</sup> There are, of course, certain analogous expressions which one might use in describing the 'numinous' experience, but these are only supports to the mind; they "do not hit with precision" and can only 'hint' at which is really meant.<sup>3</sup>

The presence in the Divine of a quality which completely transcends man's thought and language is certainly taught in the Scriptures. "Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is high as heaven; what canst thou do? Deeper than Sheol; what canst thou know?" (Job xi. 7,8). "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past tracing out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord?" (Romans xi. 33,34).

There is a reality which is so sublime and indefinable that it bursts all our linguistic containers. It is, in the deepest sense of the word, unutterable.

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<sup>1</sup> The Idea of the Holy, p. 37

<sup>2</sup> De Trin. VII, 4,7.

<sup>3</sup> Idea of the Holy, p. 52

## Chapter VI.

### THE EXPERIENCE OF CREATURE FEELING

Having isolated the 'non-rational' or 'non-moral' element in holiness, and given it the name of 'numinous,' Professor Otto undertakes a quite detailed analysis of the various features which constitute it. He proceeds to this analysis by a close study and examination of the emotional reactions which are evoked in man by his awareness of the 'numinous' object. If we are to see clearly the nature and implications of the 'numinous' experience we must put to work our own ability at introspection, and investigate what we experience in certain deeply religious moments, such as that of solemn worship. And we are to pay particular attention to that which is unique in such "states of the soul" and not met with elsewhere in human experience.

Now when one does examine his own emotions or feelings present in the experience of genuine worship, he sees that such feelings as gratitude, trust, love, reliance, humble submission, and dedication do certainly appear. But these, we are told, must be eliminated. They are met with elsewhere in human experience, and are therefore not 'unique.' They do not constitute any part of the special underivable feeling-content of the experience of worship.

The first element which Professor Otto finds in

such an experience as solemn worship, and points to as unique, is what he calls "creature-consciousness" or "creature-feeling." It is the emotion of a creature when completely overwhelmed and awed by his own insignificance before some reality which is supreme above all else:

"It is the emotion of a creature, abased and overwhelmed by its own nothingness in contrast to that which is supreme above all creatures."<sup>1</sup>

Some of the experiences narrated in the Scriptures furnish excellent examples of this emotion of "creature-consciousness." It is plainly visible in the words of Abraham when he speaks with God in behalf of the people of Sodom. He says (Genesis 18:27): "Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes." This over-powering sense of creatureliness is also present in Isaiah's exclamation in the temple: "Woe is me! for I am undone...for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts."<sup>2</sup> When the apostle Peter meets the 'numinous' in Jesus, he reveals by his actions and by his words a deep sense of his creaturehood. He cries, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man O Lord."<sup>3</sup> These incidents illustrate vividly what all sensitive souls experience when in the presence of the divine.

This particular emotional response resembles to some extent Friedrich Schleiermacher's "feeling of dependence,"

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<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., p. 10  
<sup>2</sup> Isaiah 6:5

<sup>3</sup> Luke 5:8 (*italics mine*)



but while it resembles the "feeling of dependence," it is not to be thought of as identical with it. There is something present in "creature-feeling" which is not found in the "feeling of dependence" idea. "Creature-feeling" is, to use Otto's own words, "far more than, and something other than, merely a feeling of dependence."<sup>1</sup> Schleiermacher's phrase does not adequately express what Otto has in mind. For one thing, "dependence" is not specifically a pure religious feeling. It may be aroused by other stimuli which are not divine in character. For instance, there is the purely natural feeling of dependence which a man experiences when he is in the presence of some overshadowing greatness in the natural world; but there is nothing distinctively religious about such a feeling of dependence. Again, Schleiermacher taught that the only difference between an ordinary feeling of dependence and the feeling of religious dependence is one only of degree, whereas the difference is one not merely of degree but of "intrinsic quality."<sup>2</sup> And again, what Schleiermacher emphasizes is the dependence of the 'created being' on the 'Creator,' thereby making man's relation to God a "causal relation:"

"By 'feeling of dependence' Schleiermacher means consciousness of being conditioned (as effect by cause),...On the

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<sup>1</sup> Idea of the Holy, p. 10

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.



side of the deity the correlate to 'dependence' would thus be 'causality', i.e. God's character as all-causing and all-conditioning."<sup>1</sup>

Schleiermacher's theory therefore, yields a "consciousness of createdness" instead of a "consciousness of creaturehood" which is quite definitely the character of Abraham's experience which we have already referred to:

"In the one case you have the creature as the work of the divine creative act; in the other, impotence and general nothingness as against overpowering might, dust and ashes as against 'majesty'. In the one case you have the fact of having been created; in the other, the status of the creature."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., pp. 20-21  
<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 21

Chapter VII.

MYSTERIUM TREMENDUM ET FASCINANS

Up to this point the Holy has been considered largely from the subjective side. We are now to view it objectively. Since the religious experience arises from the same genuine contact with external reality that gives rise to sense experience, we must continue our analysis of the 'numinous' in order to determine the character of the Object which it reveals. Once more we must turn to the Latin language to express what we find. When we "consider the deepest and most fundamental element in all strong and sincerely felt religious emotion," we find that "we are dealing with something for which there is only one appropriate expression"<sup>1</sup>-- mysterium tremendum et fascinans, i.e., fundamental mystery which is at once fearful and fascinating.

(a) "Mysterium"

Viewed objectively, the 'numinous' is first of all mysterium or mystery. When one is in the presence of the Holy he is before that which is "a Mystery inexpressible and above all creatures."<sup>2</sup> (Prof. Otto makes it clear that he is using the word 'mysterium' merely as an ideogram, an analogical notion taken from the natural sphere. The word cannot exhaust, but can only illustrate, the meaning of what he has in mind.)

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<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., p. 12  
<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 13

The 'mysterium' is that element in the non-rational which creates in man a state of mind which can appropriately be described by the word 'stupor:' "It signifies blank wonder, an astonishment that strikes us dumb, amazement absolute."<sup>1</sup> It is an amazement which differs from natural amazement not only in degree but in quality. We are face to face with this reaction of "blank, staring wonder" in the following two passages from the Gospel of Mark:<sup>2</sup> "And they were in the way going up to Jerusalem; and Jesus went before them: and they were amazed." "And entering into the sepulchre, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment; and they were affrighted."

The 'mysterium' taken objectively and in a religious sense, is simply that which must be termed "wholly other." Prof. Otto points out that he did not invent the term "wholly other." "In India it is over 2,500 years old, is found in the holy writings of the Upanishads, and is called in Sanskrit the 'Anyad eva.' In the West, it is over 1,600 years old, is found in Augustine and is called here the 'Aliud valde' or the 'Dissimile'."<sup>3</sup> This quality which Prof. Otto designates the "wholly other" does not belong to any reality we know, but to another sphere

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<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., p. 26

<sup>2</sup> Mark 10:32 and 16:5. (Italics mine)

<sup>3</sup> Religious Essays, p. 78

altogether, and its nature is definitely and vividly positive. Because this quality can never be grasped through rational concepts, such terms as 'transcendent' and 'supernatural' are not as fitting to describe it as the expression "wholly other."

The 'mysterium' is quite beyond our human comprehension. It is, to use a Bible phrase, "past finding out."<sup>1</sup> As Dr. William Temple says in his Gifford Lectures, it is "just that before which we do not reason but bow."<sup>2</sup> And yet, it does awaken our interest and kindle our imagination, and before it we "recoil in a wonder that strikes us chill and numb."<sup>3</sup>

The 'mysterium' has corresponding terms in the vocabulary of Mysticism. The Buddhist mystics call it 'void' and 'emptiness', and the western mystics speak of it as the 'beyond' or the 'nothing':

"By this 'nothing' is meant not only that of which nothing can be predicated, but that which is absolutely and intrinsically other than and opposite of everything that is and can be thought."<sup>4</sup>

By the 'mysterium' then, Professor Otto means the hidden depths of the divine nature which lie wholly outside the human and beyond the powers of pure reason. It

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 11:33

<sup>2</sup> Nature, Man and God, p. 23

<sup>3</sup> The Idea of the Holy, p. 28

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 30

does not therefore admit of being conceptualized and expressed (Goethe says: "The highest cannot be spoken."), but it can be felt, as the experiences of religious people testify.

(b) "Tremendum"

But the 'numinous' is not only mysterium; it is also 'mysterium tremendum.' 'Tremendum' is the adjective which describes the substantive, 'mysterium,' and adds something which is not necessarily inherent in 'mysterium.' The Object of the numinous experience is more than bare Mystery; He (if we may personalize the Object) is fearful mystery. The term 'tremendum' stands for "the daunting and repelling moment of the numinous,"<sup>1</sup> and it has three component parts: "awefulness" (absolute unapproachability), "overpoweringness" (majesty), and "energy" (urgency).

The specific emotional response which accompanies an awareness of the 'mysterium tremendum' is the feeling which is best described by the English word, "awe." In the presence of the 'numinous' man is gripped by something closely akin to fear. It is not merely the equivalent of fear, although the analogy of fear may be used to throw light upon its nature. It is an emotion which is more distinctly religious. Professor Otto insists that there is a qualitative difference between the emo-

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<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., p. 144



tional response that he is describing and the emotion of natural and ordinary fear. Even in primitive religion the resemblance to fear is external. The numinous Object awes rather than simply terrifies. Instead of an experience of bare fear, man experiences "a feeling of peculiar dread,"<sup>1</sup> "an inward shuddering,"<sup>2</sup> an emotion of dread which has in it a specific numinous element. Undoubtedly the English word which best describes this basic aspect of religious experience is the word 'awe.' (In this connection, it will be interesting to quote the following words from R. R. Marett, whose theories resemble those of Professor Otto: "Of all English words, Awe is, I think, the one that expresses the fundamental Religious Feeling most nearly. Awe is not the same thing as 'pure funk.'")<sup>3</sup> Professor Otto says that the German language has no "native-grown expression of its own for the higher and riper form of the emotion" we are considering unless it be the word 'erschauern', but it is closely designated by the cruder and more debased term, 'Schauer.'

This emotion of 'awe' is also sui generis, primary and indefinable. It is a thing quite by itself, and not reducible to any simpler elements. It is not derivable from any other feeling, and therefore is 'unevolvable.'

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<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., p. 14

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> The Threshold of Religion, p. 13 (Italics mine)



It is, to use Otto's own language, "a quite specific kind of emotional response."<sup>1</sup> Otto distinguishes between natural and religious awe, and contends that the distinction is one of intrinsic quality and not simply one of degree. It is not just the natural emotion of awe, but, as Dr. Edwards has observed,<sup>2</sup> this natural emotion "tinged or toned by the peculiar feeling-content of the numinous perception itself." That is, the emotion has in it a peculiar quality which sets it apart as distinctly religious in character.

Since the Holy is itself non-rational and non-moral in character, it calls up in the worshipper a feeling of 'awe' which is also quite non-rational and non-moral. It may be quite definitely stated therefore, that this numinous awe which Prof. Otto refers to is not mere 'reverence' in the sense in which that term is ordinarily used. Before 'reverence' can be used to describe the unique response created by the 'mysterium tremendum' it must be freed from all the moral or rational meanings which attach to the word. The experience of numinous 'dread' or 'awe' is in no sense merely a heightened form of moral respect.

In order to get at the essential meaning of this 'numinous dread' one must look at it in its first crude

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<sup>1</sup> Idea of the Holy, p. 13

<sup>2</sup> Religious Experience, Its Nature and Truth, p. 73

forms as they show themselves in primitive religion.

There it appears as 'daemonic dread:'

"Its antecedent stage is 'daemonic dread' (cf. the horror of Pan) with its queer perversion, a sort of abortive off-shoot, the 'dread of ghosts'. It first begins to stir in the feeling of 'something uncanny', 'eerie', or 'weird'."<sup>1</sup>

As religion develops this emotion of 'numinous dread' also develops into a form less crude, but even in its highest and most developed form some of its primitive tones and qualities are retained:

"And this element, softened though it is, does not disappear even on the highest level of all, where the worship of God is at its purest. Its disappearance would be indeed a loss. The 'shudder' reappears in a form ennobled beyond measure where the soul, held speechless, trembles inwardly to the furthest fibre of its being. It invades the mind mightily in Christian worship with the words: 'holy, holy, holy'; it breaks forth from the hymn of Tersteegen:

God Himself is present:

Heart, be stilled before Him:

Prostrate inwardly adore Him.

The 'shudder' has here lost its crazy and bewildering note, but not the ineffable something that holds the mind. It has become a mystical awe."<sup>2</sup>

It will be well just here to refer briefly to Professor Otto's treatment of the 'wrath of God'. This quality of the deity which plays such an important part in the Bible, is brought into relief when the emotion of 'awe'

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<sup>1</sup> Idea of the Holy, p. 15

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 17, 18

which we have just been discussing is referred to its Object in the numen. The 'Wrath of Yahweh', we are told, is but an expression of the 'tremendum'. In its purest and most original form it is non-rational and non-ethical, and has no relation to moral qualities at all:

"It is patent from many passages of the Old Testament that this 'Wrath' has no concern whatever with moral qualities. There is something very baffling in the way in which it 'is kindled' and manifested. It is, as has been well said, 'like a hidden force of nature', like stored-up electricity, discharging itself upon any one who comes too near. It is 'incalculable' and 'arbitrary'."<sup>1</sup>

The 'Wrath' of God must not be thought of as 'natural' wrath. It is non-natural and super-natural. And when we make it "righteousness in requital, and punishment for moral transgression"<sup>2</sup> we are rationalizing and moralizing the idea, and thus robbing it of its essential and unique character. It is true that in the Scriptures the original meaning is combined with the moral idea, but this was a later development.

The tremendum is unapproachable and wrathful, but it is more. It further includes the element of 'power' or 'might.' Professor Otto calls this element 'absolute overpoweringness' or 'majesty'. It is this element of 'majesty' in the divine which arouses in men the 'crea-

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<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., p. 18

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 19

ture-feeling' to which we have already referred. The divine 'majesty' so overpowers and overshadows man the creature as to wholly subdue him until he feels utterly abased and humbled, mere 'dust and ashes.' In the presence of this overwhelming 'otherness' man feels totally unworthy and insignificant. The Self is swallowed up and loses its identity. And this feeling of 'nothingness' forms "the numinous raw material for the feeling of religious humility."<sup>1</sup>

When one analyses further the 'tremendum' he discovers a third element, the element of 'energy' or 'urgency.' What Professor Otto is endeavoring to point out here is that the divine nature is not static but active, pulsating with life and vitality. This 'energy' of the numinous object, according to Otto, is "a force that knows not stint nor stay, which is urgent, active, compelling, and alive."<sup>2</sup>

"It is particularly vividly perceptible in the 'Oeyn' or 'Wrath'; and it everywhere clothes itself in symbolical expressions -- vitality, passion, emotional temper, will, force, movement, excitement, activity, impetus."<sup>3</sup>

Professor Otto argues that his use of all these symbolical expressions is not "sheer anthropomorphism." These 'natural' attributes are employed only as 'ideograms.'

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<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., p. 20

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 24

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 23

They only indicate that which is properly beyond utterance. They are not employed as "adequate concepts upon which a 'scientific' structure of knowledge may be based."<sup>1</sup>

This element of 'energy' in the 'mysterium tremendum' is found in vigorous form in the 'consuming fire' of voluntaristic Mysticism, in Fichte's conceptions of the Absolute as "gigantic, never-resting, active world-stress," in Schopenhauer's daemonic 'Will,' and in Goethe's 'daemonic' experience.

#### (C) "Fascinans"

The third and final aspect of the 'numinous' when viewed objectively, is one which seems to be directly contradictory to those already described. It is the uniquely attractive, the fascinating quality. This aspect of the numinous experience is equally as basic as the 'tremendum.' To this aspect Professor Otto gives the name 'fascinans.' At the same time that the worshipper feels himself amazed and abased, he is also aware of a beatitude, a blessedness which surpasses comprehension. The 'Wholly Other' which 'strikes us chill and numb' and evokes 'awe' has yet a real fascination for the worshipper, who seeks to claim it for his own and share its very life.

"The daemonic-divine object may appear in the mind an object of horror and dread, but at the same time it is no less something that allures with a potent charm, and the creature, who trem-

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<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., p. 24



bles before it, utterly cowed and cast down, has always at the same time the impulse to turn to it, nay even to make it somehow his own. The 'mystery' is for him not merely something to be wondered at but something that entrances him; and beside that in it which bewilders and confounds, he feels something that captivates and transports him with a strange ravishment, rising often enough to the pitch of dizzy intoxication; it is the Dionysiac-element in the numen."<sup>1</sup>

The worshipper yearns to possess the 'numen' not because of any special privilege to be gained from such possession, but because the 'numen' has a value of its own. It is an object of longing for its own sake irrespective of any special blessings it may impart. It is the 'numen' itself, not anything it offers, which draws the worshipper to it in adoration.

This non-rational element of 'fascination' cannot be described by any 'natural' attributes, though the following are suggestive: Love, Mercy, Pity, Comfort, Grace. Such concepts hint at the nature of the 'fascinans' but they do not exhaust it. This alluring element in the 'numinous' finds expression in the words of St. Paul in I Corinthians 2:9: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him."

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<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., p. 31



The peculiar feeling-response which the 'fascinans' evokes then, is not the 'shuddering dread' and the sense of 'nothingness.' Instead, it is the feeling described by such words as 'bliss', 'ecstasy' and 'rapture.' Instead of being completely overborne and hopelessly cast down in the presence of the 'numen' the creature feels glad and exalted. As William Adams Brown has expressed it, "There is a tonic quality in its mystery which is uplifting."<sup>1</sup> All genuine experiences of Salvation and religious ecstasy give expression to this phase of the 'numinous' experience. Such experiences bring a feeling of unutterable bliss and peace. The 'fascinans' is present in these words of Martin Luther: "Christians are a blissful people, who can rejoice at heart and sing praises, stamp and dance and leap for joy....Who will extol this enough or utter it forth? It is neither to be expressed nor conceived. If thou feelest it truly in the heart, it will be such a great thing to thee that thou wilt rather be silent than speak aught of it."<sup>2</sup>

A fine example of the attractiveness of holiness is the following passage from an American preacher, Phillips Brooks:<sup>3</sup> "'When they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all and followed Him.' Peter and all the

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<sup>1</sup> God At Work, p. 128

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in The Idea of the Holy, pp. 106,107

<sup>3</sup> The Influence of Jesus, p. 55 (Italics are mine)

rest! Not only all the rest, but Peter! With the imploring cry, 'Depart!' yet on his lips, he follows Him whom he had begged to go away. It was the power of love overwhelming the sense of unworthiness, and filling him with hope. It was the noble, beautiful inconsequence and inconsistency of a great nature all in tumult, which never felt the attraction of holiness so irresistibly as when it seemed altogether beyond his reach, and never so knew how unholy he was as at the very moment when the power of holiness was making him its slave and chaining him, a willing follower and servant, to the feet of the Holy One."

It is important to note that in Professor Otto's treatment of the 'numinous' the tremendum and the fascinans are fused in a perfect unity, a "harmony of contrasts." Both the terribleness and the attractiveness of the Holy are indispensable elements, and are therefore not mutually exclusive but complementary. The two ideas are blended in the Psalmist's unique phrase, "the beauty of holiness."<sup>1</sup> Our "awe-inspiring" God is "adorable." Professor Hugh Mackintosh has stated Otto's position thus:<sup>2</sup> "In Otto's vocabulary, the Divine or numinous is directly apprehended as possessing two indissociable aspects; it is at once formidable and lovable; it is fitted to evoke both reverent fear and trustful

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 96:9 (Italics mine)

<sup>2</sup> The Christian Experience of Forgiveness, pp. 156,157

surrender. The believer, conscious of sin, is aware of two voices 'Depart from me' and 'Come unto Me'."

We find that the 'tremendum' and the 'fascinans' are harmonized in the experience of solemn worship. If the divine were only 'terrible' there would be present in worship only the forms of "expiation and propitiation, the averting or the appeasement of the 'wrath' of the numen."<sup>1</sup> Such elements have indeed occupied a prominent place in worship from the primitive religions on up, but along with them there has always been present 'praise', 'adoration', 'joy'.

In Professor Otto's view of holiness then, there is no tension between God's wrath and God's love. They are not incompatible; not at war with each other. It is not 'tremendum' or 'fascinans', but 'tremendum' and 'fascinans.' It is asserted unconditionally that these two apparently contradictory qualities are equally basic in holiness. The holiness of God has a redemptive quality to which men are irresistibly drawn in hope and confidence. When God loves the creature He is not holding something back to let something through. God's love is holy love. It is not a mitigation of His holiness, but a real expression of it. The reason men so often set holiness and love against each other is that they have misunderstood the

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<sup>1</sup> The Idea of the Holy, p. 32

true meaning of real love, thinking it to be mere sentimentalism. But real love is never mawkish tenderness. To quote Professor Mackintosh again:<sup>1</sup> "The love of God is holy, majestic, awe-inspiring and august; nor can any love possess the respect of moral beings which lacks this self-maintaining stringency. Holiness is the austere element in love, preserving it from wrong. We are able to speak separately of the two things, love and holiness, because in men they often seem distinct; but in God they are indistinguishable." Students of the Bible know that Otto has only given fresh expression to a great Bible truth which has been set forth in real force and clearness by the Prophet Isaiah in such passages as the following: "Fear not, thou worm Jacob, and ye men of Israel; I will help thee, saith the Lord, and thy redeemer, the Holy One of Israel;" "As for our Redeemer, the Lord of Hosts is his name, the Holy One of Israel."<sup>2</sup> The prophetic message is that the "Redeemer" is none other than "the Holy One."

### Illustrations of the Numinous

One of the fine features of Professor Otto's book, The Idea of the Holy, and of his supplementary essays, is the great wealth of illustrative material which they

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<sup>1</sup> The Christian Experience of Forgiveness, pp. 217, 218

<sup>2</sup> Isaiah 41:14 and 47:4

contain. Professor Otto leaves no stone unturned in his effort to make his readers aware of just what quality in holiness he has singled out for analysis and discussion. Some may feel that this phase of Otto's presentation is a bit overdone. It does seem that there is scarcely an object or experience which does not in some way suggest the 'numinous' to his observing and sensitive mind. We must remember however, that Professor Otto is dealing with the intangible and the incomprehensible, and is using an unfamiliar terminology, and is anxious that his readers will not despair of his meaning. We have already referred in our discussion to some of his illustrations, but it will not be amiss if we devote some space here to a more complete list.

One is amazed at the wide variety of sources from which Professor Otto has drawn his examples. As Mr. Harvey has pointed out in his preface to The Idea of the Holy, Dr. Otto seems to have "ransacked the ages, spoiled the climes." He has found illustrations in realms which have scarcely been thought of as having any particular religious significance. One may sense the presence of the 'numen' in various types of architecture: the obelisks and pyramids of Egypt, the grouping of buildings in China, and especially in the Gothic type of the West.

"To us of the West the Gothic appears as the most numinous of all types of art. This<sup>1</sup> is due in the first place to its sublimity."

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<sup>1</sup> The Idea of the Holy, p. 70



The half-lights and shadows in temples, mosques, and churches produce the 'numinous' feeling. It is experienced in certain forms of art, in the empty spaces and distances of Oriental paintings, in the Madonnas in ancient Byzantine art, and in the "darkness" portrayed in Western art. One feels the 'numinous praesens' in the music of such great masters as Mendelssohn, Bach, and Thomas Luiz; in the sublimities of the natural world such as volcanoes, mountain peaks, moon, sun, and clouds; in the 'spooky' atmosphere of so-called 'haunted' houses; in certain sounds in the different languages; in poetry like the Indian Bhagavad-Gita. The 'numinous' is vividly present in the hymns and rituals of Christian worship, both Catholic and Protestant; in the celebration of the Romish Mass, in the Protestant observance of the Lord's Supper, and in the devotional silences of the Quakers. In all these various realms one encounters that unique quality of mystery - that reality which transcends reason in the narrow sense. And when one encounters it, he is aware that it is quite distinct and unique, and cannot be identified with any other reality we know.

It is Professor Otto's contention that while the 'numinous praesens' is manifested in all these things which we have mentioned above, it is pre-eminently in evidence in the Bible:



"While the feelings of the non-rational and numinous constitute a vital factor in every form ~~of~~ religion may take, they are preeminently in evidence in Semitic religion and most of all in the religion of the Bible. Here Mystery lives and moves in all its potency."<sup>1</sup>

Otto regards the Bible as a truly 'numinous' book. It will be well to review here some of the passages in the Old and New Testaments which he singles out as being particularly charged with 'numinous' content.

One finds occasional echoes of the lower and more primitive stage of the numinous consciousness, that of "daemonic dread," in the earlier narratives of the Old Testament. Our attention is directed to the fourth chapter of Exodus where the wrathful Yahweh met Moses in the way, and, as the record says, "sought to kill him." Two other passages give expression to this "primal numinous awe:" the narrative of Jacob at Bethel (Genesis 28:17), and of the burning bush (Exodus 3). The numinous element is still more vividly displayed in the writings of the prophets, particularly in those of Isaiah and Ezekiel. The 'mysterium tremendum' is keenly felt when one reads the 6th chapter of Isaiah. In the temple vision the prophet encounters the Holy One in all His sublimity, awefulness and overpoweringness, so that he becomes painfully aware of his creaturehood and impotence. And in

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<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., p. 74

the prophet Ezekiel's "dreams and parables and fanciful delineation of God's being and sovereign state" we observe the power of the numinous to excite and intensify the imagination.

In many of the Psalms the presence of the numinous element is easily distinguished. In one of his supplementary essays,<sup>1</sup> Professor Otto calls attention to Chrysostom's treatment of Psalm 139 where he clearly notes the emotions of 'stupor' and 'awe.' Chrysostom's words are as follows: "When he (i.e. the Psalmist) gazes down into the immeasurable, yawning (*ἄγανός*) Depth of the *ἀγανός* divine Wisdom, dizziness comes upon him and he recoils in terrified wonder and cries:....'Thy knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, above my power (I am too weak for it: LXX)'."

In this same essay<sup>2</sup> Professor Otto calls attention to Chrysostom's analysis of the prophet Daniel's experience of ecstasy in Daniel 10:5-8. Daniel is visited by a subduing manifestation of the 'numinous', and he describes the effect it had upon him in these words: "There remained no strength in me: for my comeliness was turned in me into corruption, and I retained no strength." Chrysostom's comment on Daniel's experience, in which he calls

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<sup>1</sup> Chrysostom on the Inconceivable in God, Appendix I. of "The Idea of the Holy," p. 186

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 187

attention to the stupifying and overpowering quality of the 'mysterium tremendum,' is as follows: "For just as happens when the charioteer loses hold of the reins in terror, so that the horses bolt and the chariot overturns,...so it befell the Prophet. His affrighted soul could not bear the sight of the Angel made manifest, could not endure the supernatural light, and was overwhelmed. It strove to break free from the bonds of the flesh as from a harness...and he lay there in a swoon."

Professor Otto's favourite illustration from the Old Testament is the latter part of the book of Job, chapters 38-42. In these chapters Job is overpowered and dumb before the majesty of "the Lord" Who speaks to him in authoritative tones out of the "whirlwind." The God Who speaks is the sovereign and majestic creator and preserver of the universe. When "the Lord" finishes rehearsing, with cumulative effect, his mighty works, Job is wholly subdued, not by any display of superior power merely, but by the sublimity and greatness of the 'Mysterium,' the 'Wholly Other.' And Job cries: "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." This is the cry of one who feels deeply his creaturehood, and recognizes his impotence and unworthiness. Here is displayed the "sheer wondrousness that transcends thought."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Idea of the Holy, p. 81

But Job is not overwhelmed to the point of being utterly cast down. God comes to him as 'fascinans' as well as 'tremendum' so that he is drawn to the divine in praise and adoration. Job submits, but in positive, not negative, surrender.

The numinous is also revealed in the book of Job in the references to birds and animals, such as the eagle, ostrich, wild ass, unicorn, hippopotamus, and crocodile. These, Otto claims,<sup>1</sup>

"do express in masterly fashion the downright stupendousness, the wellnigh daemonic and wholly incomprehensible character of the eternal creative power; how, incalculable and 'wholly other', it mocks at all conceiving but can yet stir the mind to its depths, fascinate and overbrim the heart."

### New Testament

In the New Testament the 'numinous' has a much richer and fuller content than it had in the Old Testament. And this is due to the moralization and rationalization process which began in the "venerable religion of Moses" and has continued with ever-increasing momentum all the way down the line.

In the Gospels the numinous element is certainly present in Jesus' doctrines of the 'Kingdom' and the 'Fatherhood of God.' Concerning the 'Kingdom' teaching

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<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., p. 82

Professor Otto remarks:<sup>1</sup>

"The 'kingdom' is just greatness and marvel absolute, the 'wholly other' 'heavenly' thing, set in contrast to the world of here and now, 'the mysterious' itself in its dual character as awe-compelling yet all-attracting, glimmering in an atmosphere of genuine 'religious awe'."

And those who proclaim and prepare for this 'kingdom' are *οἱ ἅγιοι*, 'the holy ones' or 'the Saints', not because they are morally perfect people, but because they share the mystery of the coming Kingdom. The 'heavenly Father' is Lord of this 'Kingdom,' and is more numinous or 'holy' than the kingdom itself. In Him all the numinous elements in the Old Testament are brought to completion and absoluteness:<sup>2</sup>

"For the God of the New Testament is not less holy than the God of the Old Testament, but more holy. The interval between the creature and Him is not diminished but made absolute; the unworthiness of the profane in contrast to Him is not extenuated but enhanced."

It is true that Jesus' doctrine of God as 'heavenly Father' does not seem specifically to include the idea of Holiness, but that is due to the fact that there was no need of His teaching that God was 'the Holy One in Israel.' That was a self-evident fact to every Jew. Christ had only to proclaim what was not self-evident to the Jew and original with Him, namely, that this 'Holy One in Israel'

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<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., p. 85

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 59



was their 'heavenly Father.'

Professor Otto sees strong indications of the numinous in the first petition of the Lord's Prayer: "Hallowed be thy name." The 'tremendum' is strongly suggested in the words of Matthew 10:28. The same dark awe-inspiring note is present also in Matthew 21:41, Hebrews 10:31, and Hebrews 12:29. We cannot understand the full meaning of Christ's agony in the Garden of Gethsamane unless we approach it from the viewpoint of a numinous experience:

"There is more here than the fear of death; there is the awe of the creature before the 'mysterium tremendum', before the shuddering secret of the numen."<sup>1</sup>

In the Gospels it is the Cross of Christ which is par excellence the embodiment of awe-inspiring Holiness. In the Cross we have the completion of the "transcendent mysteriousness and 'beyondness' of God."

St. Paul's disparagement and denunciation of 'the Flesh' is, according to Professor Otto, just another expression of the sense of creaturehood. The reason Paul disparages the Flesh is because when contrasted with the transcendent character of the Holy it is seen to be impotent, profane, impure, perishing -- unworthy to come into the presence of divine holiness.

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<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., p. 88



It is most interesting that Professor Otto should fasten on St. Paul's doctrine of Predestination as another manifestation of the 'numinous'. Predestination, he asserts, is nothing but an intensified 'creature-feeling' put into conceptual language.

"The numen, overpoweringly experienced, becomes the all in all. The creature, with his being and doing, his 'willing' and 'running', his schemes and resolves, becomes nothing....In face of the eternal power man is reduced to nought, together with his free choice and action. And the eternal power waxes immeasurable just because it fulfils its decrees, despite the freedom of human will."<sup>1</sup>

A numinous atmosphere pervades the mystical writings of St. John. There are only faint traces of the element of 'tremendum,' but 'mysterium' and 'fascinans' are present in real force. For instance, when St. John defines God as a 'Spirit' he means that God is the Wholly Other, that which is totally different and distinct from the 'world' and the 'flesh.' As 'spirit' God is "the utterly mysterious and miraculous heavenly Being who surpasses all the understanding and reason of the 'natural' man."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., p. 92

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 96

Chapter VIII.

THE RATIONALIZATION AND MORALIZATION OF THE HOLY

It is quite clear that in Professor Otto's view the essential characteristic of holiness is non-rational and non-moral. The deepest and most constitutive element in holiness is the 'numinous', and the 'numinous' is a quite distinctive category. Originally holiness was made up solely of the 'numen', the rational and the moral element being entirely absent. But while Otto insists that the 'numinous' is the original and fundamental element in holiness, he also teaches that as religion advanced beyond the primitive stage there was a "gradual shaping and filling in with ethical meaning,"<sup>1</sup> so that holiness as we see it in the New Testament is a complex category combining the non-rational and non-moral with the rational and the moral. In Christianity holiness is a fabric in which the non-rational is the woof, and the rational or ethical the warp.

It is possible to trace the ethecizing process through the Bible. It begins with the venerable religion of Moses and proceeds "with ever-increasing momentum" through the Prophets until it reaches its highest and fullest development in the Gospels.

"To get the full meaning of the word 'holy' as we find it used in the New Testament, we must no longer understand

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<sup>1</sup> The Idea of the Holy, p. 6

by 'the holy' or 'sacred' the merely numinous in general, nor even the numinous as its own highest development; we must always understand by it the numinous completely permeated and saturated with elements signifying rationality, purpose, personality, morality."<sup>1</sup>

It was necessary that this process of rationalization and moralization should take place. The idea of holiness needs both the non-rational and the rational. It needs the non-rational to keep it from passing into 'rationalism', and it needs the rational or moral to guard it from running into 'mere mysticality.' To do without either of these constitutive elements would injure the highest conception of holiness and result in the impoverishment of religion.

Professor Otto proceeds to show us just how this rationalization and moralization of the 'numinous' takes place. It is not simply a matter of the evolution of the numinous, for the numinous is a priori and sui generis. And since the 'numen' stands for "a clear overplus of meaning" and is absolutely non-rational and non-moral, it cannot become moralized through any development within itself. The process then, is not one of logical evolution from non-rational to rational. The 'numinous' passes through a development of its own in the evolution of religion. From 'daemonic dread' it rises

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<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., p. 113

through various gradations until it becomes 'the fear of God.' The 'shudder' of primitive religion becomes the 'holy awe' of developed religion. Now while this development is taking place within the 'numinous' itself, there is another development going on alongside it. This other development "begins at an early stage" and is "the process of rationalization and moralization on the basis of the numinous consciousness."<sup>1</sup> This latter development is "secondary and subsidiary" to the development of the non-rational, and did not begin as early. These two processes of development within holiness "nearly, if not quite" synchronize and keep p~~l~~ace with each other. At some point in religious history the two miraculously come together, are "conjoined", resulting in an "indissoluble synthesis:"

"More and more these ideas come to enter into the very essence of the numen and charge the term with ethical content. 'Holy' becomes 'good', and 'good' from that very fact in turn becomes 'holy', 'sacrosanct'; until there results a thenceforth indissoluble synthesis of the two elements, and the final outcome is thus the fuller, more complex sense of 'holy', in which it is at once good and sacrosanct."<sup>2</sup>

The union of the two processes is real and genuine, and is "not a mere combination of analogies."<sup>3</sup> The two are not connected externally, but are 'conjoined' "according

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<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., p. 114

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 47

to principles of true inward affinity and cohesion."<sup>1</sup>

Now the process by which this synthesis of the non-rational and the rational is accomplished is called 'Schematization', after the manner of Immanuel Kant. When the category of the non-moral is 'schematized' by the ethical there is yielded the complex category of holiness.

"As the rational elements...come together in the historical evolution of religions with the non-rational, they serve to 'schematize' these...The tremendum, the daunting and repelling moment of the numinous, is schematized by means of the rational ideas of justice, moral will, and the exclusion of what is opposed to morality; and schematized thus, it becomes the holy 'Wrath of God', which Scripture and Christian preaching alike proclaim. The fascinans, the attracting and alluring moment of the numinous, is schematized by means of the ideas of goodness, mercy, love, and, so schematized, becomes all that we mean by Grace, that term so rich in import, which unites with the holy Wrath in a single 'harmony of contrasts', and like it is, from the numinous strain in it, tinged with Mysticism. The moment mysteriosum is schematized by the absoluteness of all rational attributes applied to the Deity."<sup>2</sup>

While the numinous or non-rational is 'schematized' by the rational and the moral, it is never superseded or eclipsed by it. Since the numinous element is the original and essential quality in holiness it never loses its

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<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., p. 46

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 144, 145



identity however much the rational or ethical content is poured into it. The 'numinous' was first in point of time and continues to be the basis of all further development and enrichment of the idea of holiness. The 'numinous' is simply filled out and strengthened by the process of 'schematization.' In Otto's words, "The 'moralization' process assumes the numinous and is only completed upon this as basis."<sup>1</sup> The numinous attracts and appropriates meanings from the moral and rational sphere. "These become the 'will' of the numen, and the numen their guardian, ordainer, and author."<sup>2</sup>

Holiness then, as we know it, is a composite of the non-rational element of 'the sacred' and the rational element of 'the good.' Yet the fact that it is thus a 'complex category' does not mean that it cannot be considered as a category, for in both "the combining elements" it is "a purely a priori category."<sup>3</sup> The category of moral obligation no less than that of the 'numinous' is a priori:

"We conclude, then, that not only the rational but also the non-rational elements of the complex category of 'holiness' are a priori elements in the same degree. Religion is not in vassalage either to morality or teleology, 'ethos' or 'telos', and does not draw its life from postulates;..."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., p. 115

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 114

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 116

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 140

It now becomes necessary for Professor Otto to explain just how two a priori elements which have developed quite apart from each other can be brought together in any real and living union. That such should happen is the "most surprising of all the facts in the history of religion."<sup>1</sup> Still it happens. Such an 'intimate coalescence' or fusion, however much it daunts our understanding, is a self-evident truth. There is only one way to explain this union of two a priori categories, and that is to say that they are a priori also in their connection or conjunction. There is no way out except to 'assume' such an a priori conjunction of the two elements.

"But the same a priori character belongs, in the third place, to the connexion of the rational and the non-rational elements in religion, their inward and necessary union. The histories of religion recount indeed, as though it were something axiomatic, the gradual interpretation of the two, the process by which 'the divine' is charged and filled out with ethical meaning. And this process is, in fact, felt as something axiomatic, something whose inner necessity we feel to be self-evident. But then this inward self-evidence is a problem in itself; we are forced to assume an obscure, a priori knowledge of the necessity of this synthesis, combining rational and non-rational. For it is not by any means a logical necessity. How should it be logically inferred from the still 'crude', half-daemonic character of a moon-god or a sun-god or a numen attached to some locality, that he is a guardian and guarantor of the oath and of honourable dealing, of hospitality,

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<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., p. 140

of the sanctity of marriage, and of duties to tribe and clan? How should it be inferred that he is a god who decrees happiness and misery, participates in the concerns of the tribe, provides for its well-being, and directs the course of destiny and history? Whence comes this most surprising of all the facts in the history of religion, that beings, obviously born originally of horror and terror, become gods - beings to whom men pray, to whom they confide their sorrow or their happiness, in whom they behold the origin and the sanction of morality, law, and the whole canon of justice? And how does all this come about in such a way that, when once such ideas have been aroused, it is understood at once as the plainest and most evident of axioms, that so it must be?"<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., pp. 140-141

## Chapter IX.

### THE FACULTY OF DIVINATION

Throughout his The Idea of the Holy Professor Otto refers again and again to the fact that since the numinous 'holy' is essentially non-rational in character it cannot be grasped or understood by pure intellect. It transcends all conceptual thinking. Therefore as man needs an artistic appreciation in order to experience the beautiful, so also does he need to be religious-minded if he is to recognize the 'divine' or the 'holy' in its various outward manifestations. The 'numinous' may be "directly encountered in particular occurrences and events, self-revealed in persons and displayed in actions."<sup>1</sup> But while the 'natural' man, i.e., the man who is not alive to spiritual or religious realities, may encounter the 'holy' in its outward manifestations he is not able to recognize it as such. He is, to use another figure, 'blind' to the numinous reality. He is lacking in "intuitive apprehension."<sup>2</sup>

Professor Otto uses the word 'divination' to denote man's faculty or capacity for recognizing the 'holy' in its self-revelations. This faculty of 'divination' appears in theological language as testimonium Spiritus Sancti internum, the inner witness of the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>1</sup> The Idea of the Holy, p. 147

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 172

It is an intuitive capacity of the religious consciousness. Otto illustrates his meaning by appealing to the aesthetic faculty or judgement which, he says, is the best analogy. Here, as in 'divination', judgements are based upon feeling rather than upon logic. And, as a beautiful object can only be beautiful to the man who possesses 'aesthetic valuation', so the 'holy' can only be cognized and recognized by the man who possesses 'religious insight', or 'the faculty of divination.'

The faculty of divination is something entirely different from understanding, for understanding is the faculty of "reflection in concept and demonstration;" and knowing and understanding conceptually are two different things. Genuine divination has no need of intellectual proofs and logical processes. The religious consciousness simply encounters the 'holy' in its outward revelations, and, upon encountering it, knows it as 'holy' with an immediate religious intuition.

"Such a conclusion is not the result of logical compulsion; it does not follow from clearly conceived premisses; it is an immediate, underivable judgement of pure recognition, and it follows a premiss that defies exposition and springs directly from an irreducible feeling of the truth."<sup>1</sup>

"The experience must come, not by demonstration, but by pure contemplation, through the mind submitting itself un-

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<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., p. 174



reservedly to a pure 'impression' of the object."<sup>1</sup>

'Divination' then, must always be a recognition which is unconstrained and spontaneous, an 'inward acknowledgement' which comes from deep within the soul of a man.

As Otto points out this theory of 'divination' is no new discovery of his. It was taught by Jakob Fries in his doctrine of 'ahndung', and by Schleiermacher in his Discourses upon Religion, and also by De Wette. But while it is true that the idea of 'divination' is not original with Otto it must be said that he has presented it in a much more developed and clarified form. We think that Professor W. P. Paterson was right in classifying Otto as the advocate of a "special religious sense,"<sup>2</sup> and will add that in this role he seems to us to excel.

Professor Otto denies what Schleiermacher "naïvely and unreflectingly assumes." namely, that this faculty of 'divination' is common to all men. The power of recognition may be present in all men as one of the general capacities of mind and spirit, and in that sense may be thought of as a universal potentiality, but all men do not exercise it, and therefore, it is actualized in some more than in others.

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<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., p. 172

<sup>2</sup> The Nature of Religion, p. 169

"But what is a universal potentiality of man as such is by no means to be found in actuality the universal possession of every single man; very frequently it is only disclosed as a special endowment and equipment of particular gifted individuals...No man in general (as rationalism holds), but only special 'divinatory' natures possess the faculty of divination in actuality."<sup>1</sup>

The question naturally arises, how may those who know and have experienced the 'holy' impart this peculiar knowledge to others? Of course it cannot be imparted to them through concepts, or teaching. They must experience it for themselves. Those who possess it can assist their fellows to a possession of it only by analogies which 'do not hit with precision,' and by words of encouragement to seek it with the whole heart. In other words, this experience cannot, strictly speaking, be taught; "it can only be evoked, awakened in the mind; as everything that comes 'of the spirit' must be awakened."<sup>2</sup> Professor Hodgson has illustrated this point by using the analogy of an artist endeavouring to share with someone his recognition of the beautiful:<sup>3</sup>

"If asked by another to explain why he has said, 'This is beautiful' the artist is ultimately driven to say, 'Look! Can't you see it for yourself? If not, no words of mine can show it to you. They may be able to help you to see what I see as I see it, but only when you see it for yourself will you really understand what I meant.'"

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<sup>1</sup> The Idea of the Holy, p. 154

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit., p. 7

<sup>3</sup> The Place of Reason in Christian Apologetic, p. 3.

By way of summary, Professor Otto means by 'divination' an immediate intuitive faculty of religious perception, a sort of spiritual 'insight' or 'discernment,' by which we may know reality which we cannot express or prove on any rational, conceptual basis. Many will not agree at all with Otto's theory. There is much however, to be said for his contention. Those who have had first-hand experiences of God which have run deep will know that there is much of truth in what he is saying. Religious people do sometimes come to the place where the only reason they can give for the faith that is in them is that they have the feeling deep down in the soul that it is true. In the last analysis, is it not true that frequently the most precious articles of a man's faith come to be real to him simply through the 'witness' of an inner conviction? In Lord Tennyson's language, may not a man go on believing where he cannot prove? May he not know "the peace of God which passes understanding" with "the certitude of first-hand insight?"<sup>1</sup> Was not St. Paul speaking of this faculty of religious insight when he wrote: "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Idea of the Holy, p. 141  
<sup>2</sup> I Corinthians 2:14

## Chapter X.

### THE HOLINESS OF JESUS

It is Professor Otto's view that Jesus Christ is divination's supreme and worthiest object. He is more than the 'supreme divining subject,' which is Schleiermacher's view; He is the 'object of divination par excellence.'<sup>1</sup> And it is this which distinguishes Jesus from the prophets and teachers. He is not simply one among many religious teachers, but is quite unique. His significance for men is not finished when He arouses them to the intuition of the 'divine'; He is the 'divine.' Jesus is "holiness made manifest."<sup>2</sup> He is:

"a person in whose being, life, and mode of living we realize of ourselves by 'intuition and feeling' the self-revealing power and presence of the Godhead."<sup>3</sup>

In Jesus we meet the 'Holy' in all its 'mystery', 'awe-inspiringness', and 'fascination'. As Professor Mackintosh has so well expressed it:<sup>4</sup> "Jesus is holy, in the full profound sense of the word -- not only, as has been said, 'separate from sinners, but distinct from saints'."

The Master's greatest contribution to our thought of holiness lies not in anything He ever said or did, but supremely in what He was. He declared in his own person this holiness, and thereby intensified and made clear and

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<sup>1</sup> The Idea of the Holy, p. 159

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> The Christian Apprehension of God, p. 154

compelling our sense of it.

In the Gospels it is clear that Jesus' contemporaries, His enemies as well as His friends, recognized in Him that which they could not comprehend, but which overawed them and filled them with deep reverence in His presence. Professor Otto cites the following as good examples of the numinous impression which Jesus made on His followers: (Matthew 8:8) "The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof"; (Mark 10:32) "And Jesus went before them; and they were amazed; and as they followed, they were afraid"; (Luke 5:8) "When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord." In each of the above instances Jesus is felt to be more than a creature; He is felt to be 'divine'. And the very fact that Jesus' own relatives said that He was 'possessed' or 'beside himself' was but "an involuntary acknowledgement of the 'numinous' impression he made upon them."<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, Jesus aroused in His disciples the spontaneous conviction that He was their Messiah, and the name 'Messiah' stood for "the numinous being par excellence."<sup>2</sup>

Is it possible for those of us who live in the twentieth century to experience the holiness of Jesus? Can

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<sup>1</sup> The Idea of the Holy, p. 163

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.



we know Him as the 'Holy One' through the faculty of religious insight? Most assuredly we can. We have the New Testament, a reliable record of what Jesus was, said and did. If we will behold in deep and unhurried 'contemplation' the person, life, and teachings of Jesus as there revealed we will become intuitively aware of His 'numinous' character. And particularly will we find this awareness growing in us if we 'contemplate' the story of Jesus' death on the Cross.

"There is that burden of non-rational, mystical significance, which hangs like a cloud over Golgotha. Whoever can thus immerse himself in contemplation and open his whole mind resolutely to a pure impression of all this combined will surely find growing in him, obedient to an inward standard that defies expression, the pure feeling of 'recognition of holiness', the 'intuition of the eternal in the temporal.'"<sup>1</sup>

Professor Otto's interpretation of the holiness of Jesus is a natural consequence of his theory concerning the numinous. It differs widely from the popular conception. When mention is made of the holiness of Jesus most men will think at once of His sinlessness, His purity, His moral perfection. To them such New Testament passages as the following do adequately set forth the truth of the holiness of our Lord: "Which of you convicteth me of sin?"<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., p. 173  
<sup>2</sup> John 8:46

"Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth."<sup>1</sup>  
Now Professor Otto would probably not deny that sinlessness might properly be considered a feature of Jesus' holiness, but he certainly would not consent to have it the dominant idea. To him Jesus is the numinous 'Mystery' par excellence, and therefore the most 'holy' of all men. And it is in His numinous character rather than in His sinlessness that Jesus' holiness principally consists.

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<sup>1</sup> I Peter ii:22

## Chapter XI.

### OTTO'S DOCTRINE OF SIN AND ATONEMENT

Having examined Professor Otto's conception of holiness, we are now to point out the effect which this conception had upon his doctrines of Sin and Atonement.

#### Sin

In his Introduction to Religious Essays Otto acknowledges that his examination and analysis of the 'holy' gave him a more comprehensive understanding of the meaning of sin. In this same Introduction he epitomizes his doctrine of sin in this terse statement: "Sin is a religious, not a moral concept."<sup>1</sup> This is his fundamental principle, and the key to all that he has to say on the subject of sin. Historically sin emerged as a purely religious concept, as something altogether apart from mere wrong-doing in the moral sense. Originally it lay in a realm entirely different from the realm of the 'bad':

"In the early stages of the development of these ideas, sin and the religious 'impurity' which result from it need not invade moral values in the least, and may yet lie with terrible weight upon the spirit."<sup>2</sup>

Sin is fundamentally "the obverse of the holy."<sup>3</sup> This is not to say that sin has no moral significance, for we must remember that 'the holy' is, in its fullest development, charged with ethical content. The idea

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<sup>1</sup> Religious Essays, p. v.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 3

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 1

of sin like the idea of the 'holy' has been 'schematized! by the rational and the moral. But just as 'moral perfection' does not exhaust the idea of holiness, so 'moral badness' does not exhaust the meaning of sin.

"The sphere of sin completely includes the sphere of the bad; but having a greater content, it also extends beyond it."<sup>1</sup>

Sin cannot be reduced simply to 'iniquity' or 'moral badness.' Moral badness is to be thought of primarily as the 'outward manifestation' of man's sinfulness, 'a consequence or effect' of his disregard of the Holy One. In Professor Brunner's words, "The fact that man does evil, indicates that he is evil."<sup>2</sup> Transgression becomes sin not just because it is the violation of any express command of the Law, but because it springs from an arrogant will which spurns the entrance of the 'holy'.

"Man is withdrawn from the bad, having first been withdrawn from sin as faithlessness."<sup>3</sup>

Now if sin is "the obverse of the holy" the word which best describes it is 'godlessness' or 'profaneness': "Sin is profanity; it is not to possess God, it is godlessness."<sup>4</sup> The sinner is, above all else, 'the worldling'. He is the opposite of a godly man.

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<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., p. 1

<sup>2</sup> The Theology of Crisis, p. 54

<sup>3</sup> Religious Essays, p. 15

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 25

There is a real distinction between 'the godly man' and the 'worldling', but it does not lie in the fact that one is a man of rectitude, and the other is not. It lies rather in this: that one is linked to the 'divine' so that the divine life courses through him, while the other is a slave of the 'world'. To say then, that a man is not 'religious' means much more than to say simply that he is not 'ethical.'

Sin is not merely the transgression of the Moral Law as such, but essentially a wrong relation to God. In the words of Professor Brunner: "Sin means that I am in wrong relation to God and that I have torn myself away from an original divinely given possibility."<sup>1</sup> Or perhaps it would be more correct to say that the essence of sin consists in a lack of any relation to 'the holy'. This lack of relation to the 'divine' is "religious 'impurity',"<sup>2</sup> and the root or fountain of all moral impurity. Fundamentally sin is not just infringement of a command; it is rebellion against God, contempt of 'the Holy One'." Sin is self-assertion, self-centeredness, self-will. It is the 'stiff-necked' wilfulness to have one's own egoistic way. It is a stubborn refusal of the divine or holy image. It is the absence of a living 'Faith', the contentment with being 'Flesh'

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<sup>1</sup> The Theology of Crisis, p. 54

<sup>2</sup> Religious Essays, p. 3



instead of 'Spirit'. "And flesh is primarily not an antagonism against moral laws but a deficiency in the divine through turning aside from faith."<sup>1</sup> Sin is 'sacrilege', 'a violation of the Divine':

"For Christians sin remains primarily that which lies purely within the realm of religious relationships: it is primarily the failure, inhibition, or atrophy of the purely religious spiritual functions themselves, of reverence and awe towards God, of trust, fear, love for God; of the life hidden with Christ in God, of immediate dependence upon and frank communion with God; it is the obstruction of the workings of his word and spirit, or in short, as Luther would say, disobedience to the first commandment."<sup>2</sup>

"Sin is lack of the divine itself, it is not-to-have God; it is a very turning away from the Eternal as it reveals and imparts itself; in general terms it is the reluctance of the creature to be drawn to God, and lastly, the 'natural man's' resistance against grace itself."<sup>3</sup>

Man stands guilty and condemned because he has no fellowship with the 'holy'; because he has no place in his mind and life for God; because he intentionally neglects or slights the 'numinous' Object. His guilt lies in his estrangement from God. The emphasis must be laid upon the fact that the Prodigal has rebelliously dwelt in the "far country" and not upon the fact of his "riotous living" while there. Sin then, is not simply a

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<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., p. 14

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 6

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 14

rational concept, but one that is distinctly religious. God is much more than just personalized Moral Law. He is our 'holy' Father. And He is wounded by man's attitude of egoism and self-sufficiency more than by man's 'badness'.

Otto points out that in his treatment of sin he is in agreement with Eckhart and Luther,<sup>1</sup> for with them as with him, sin is regarded supremely as a religious concept. Eckhart viewed sin as 'separateness' from God, 'self-seeking', 'the wish-to-be-something-oneself in contradiction to God and outside God', 'the struggling against union with God'. Luther spoke of sin as 'my-ness'. And we might add that Professor Brunner in his The Theology of Crisis seems to take substantially the same view as the quotations from him already inserted in this chapter would indicate.

In such a state of 'religious impurity' man is 'lost' and cannot come into fellowship with the 'holy' through any exercise of his will to moral goodness. Such fellowship is possible only through a 'Faith' which is religious and not moral. A spiritual miracle~~✓~~ must be performed; that is, a man must experience a 'rebirth':

"Lostness is the natural profanity lying outside of moral values and not to be overcome by any act of volition; it

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<sup>1</sup> Religious Essays, p. 14 (footnote)

is the incapacity to find or to appreciate the divine object, before or without its revelation; finally it is the fact that man, as a profane creature, resists the supernatural and keeps it at bay, and wins through only by means of a mystic act of rebirth which goes to the roots of his being, and which can come only 'by means of the spirit'.<sup>1</sup>

Professor Otto's view of holiness has led him to emphasize a side of sin which men had been neglecting as they wrote and preached on the subject. Sin is ordinarily conceived of as moral transgression only. Now Otto's suggestion that fundamentally sin is "godlessness" is suggestive. It stresses an aspect of sin which is certainly present in the Bible, and which gave Jesus great concern. The commandment which mattered more than any other was, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God."<sup>2</sup> When men refuse to give God the ~~due~~ honor and worship due Him; when they have no place in their lives for Him, they are, in the deepest sense of the word, sinners. Many are of the opinion that the chief sin of this generation is "secularism", the neglect of that which is distinctly religious or spiritual, the denial of 'the holy' and allegiance to 'the worldly'; that the chief enemy of individuals and of nations is found not in overt acts of wrong-doing, but in spiritual barrenness and 'profane' minds. There is much of truth in this. Man does need

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<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., p. 23  
<sup>2</sup> Matthew 22:37

redemption from his "godlessness". Until that sin has been repented of and forgiveness provided, there is not much point in trying to erase the sins of "badness" which are the outward expressions of this godless spirit.

### Atonement

Since sin is a religious concept, so also is atonement. Atonement is "altogether and specifically numinous in character."<sup>1</sup> Otto's favourite word for describing atonement is the word 'covering'. The 'profane' creature finds the numen unapproachable; he is entirely unworthy and unfit to approach 'the holy'. He has need therefore, of a 'covering' or 'sheltering' to protect him from the 'Wrath' of the numen, because the 'Spirit' is a 'dire devouring flame' for all uncovered 'Flesh'.<sup>2</sup> "Such a 'covering' is then a 'consecration', i.e. a procedure that renders the approacher himself 'numinous', frees him from his 'profane' being and fits him for intercourse with the numen."<sup>3</sup>

But how does the profane creature receive the 'covering' he so severely needs? It is bestowed by the 'numen' itself. The numen imparts something of its own quality to the creature, rendering him 'numinous' and therefore 'worthy' to stand in the presence of the Wholly Other and commune with it. The numen 'cleanses' the crea-

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<sup>1</sup> The Idea of the Holy, p. 56

<sup>2</sup> Religious Essays, p. 34

<sup>3</sup> The Idea of the Holy, p. 56



ture from his profaneness, and renders him 'holy'.

"The means of 'consecration'...are derived from, or conferred and appointed by, the numen itself, which bestows something of its own quality to make man capable of communion with it." <sup>1</sup>

The 'covering' is a kind of 'wedding garment' which the creature must have on before he can enter the wedding feast of the numen. (Professor Otto's use of the word 'covering' calls to mind the first verse of the 32nd Psalm: "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered." <sup>2</sup>)

Now the necessity for such atonement is felt by the approaching creature even more keenly than he feels the need for atonement for moral wrong-doing. The sense of religious impurity weighs down even more heavily upon him than the sense of moral impurity. Man longs to be released from this killing sense of 'self-depreciation' which he experiences when in the presence of the numen.

Otto says that this access into the presence of 'the holy' provided by means of the 'covering', is to him a source of never-failing wonder. "It is a grace beyond ~~the~~ our power to apprehend, a prodigious paradox." <sup>3</sup> But while it is wonderful and incomprehensible, it is

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<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., p. 56

<sup>2</sup> Italics mine

<sup>3</sup> The Idea of the Holy, p. 59



none the less true and precious. Without it Christianity would be shallow and superficial.

## Chapter XII.

### CALVIN AND OTTO CONTRASTED

Before entering definitely into any criticism of the views which Calvin and Otto held on the subject of the holiness of God, it will be well to give a brief and rather general statement of ways in which these two great thinkers were unlike, first, as regards the influences shaping their thought, and second, as regards their methods of approach in dealing with the subject of holiness. The doctrine of holiness as held by each of these men was determined in part at least by these influences and methods of approach.

#### Influences shaping their thinking

John Calvin was a truly independent thinker, but there are two theologians who left their mark on his thought. One was Martin Bucer, the celebrated Strassbourg reformer. Just how early Calvin came under Bucer's influence is uncertain. Kampschulte makes the claim that in 1528 Calvin was actually a student in Bucer's classes in Strassbourg, but Hastings Eells contends that "Bucer exercised no personal influence upon Calvin before the Synod of Bern" in 1537.<sup>1</sup> Many feel that Calvin's Institutes show the impress of Bucer's Evangelien-kommentar which was published in 1527. Whether Calvin took his first steps in the Reformed Faith under the guiding hand

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<sup>1</sup> See Princeton Review, Vol. XXII, p. 403

of Martin Bucer is debatable, but there is hardly any doubt that the Strassbourg reformer affected Calvin's general theological viewpoint. Wilhelm Pauck speaks of Bucer as "the father of Calvinism,"<sup>1</sup> and Seeberg claims that "Butzerianism was the preparatory stage of Calvinism."<sup>2</sup> Williston Walker says that Calvin "owed much to Martin Bucer of Strassburg."<sup>3</sup> Calvin indeed expressed his gratitude to Bucer in the prefaces to his commentaries on Romans, Psalms, and the Gospels. We can see a definite trace of Bucer's influence in Calvin's emphasis upon the "glory of God," and in linking Predestination directly with it; also in Calvin's view of the Lord's Supper. Dr. McGiffert says that the "principal importance of Bucer in the history of Protestant thought is due to the fact that he influenced the great Genevan reformer, John Calvin, and through him affected permanently the theology of the reformed churches."<sup>4</sup> And Dr. Warfield states that Calvin "perfectly entered" into Bucer's practical and ethical point of view. He further states:<sup>5</sup>

"Many of the very forms of statement most characteristic of Calvin...only reproduce, though of course with that clearness and religious depth peculiar to Calvin, the precise teachings of Bucer, who was above all others, accord-

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<sup>1</sup> The Journal of Religion, 1929, p. 256

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 238

<sup>3</sup> John Calvin, The Organiser of Reformed Protestantism, p.147

<sup>4</sup> Protestant Thought Before Kant, p. 83

<sup>5</sup> Calvin and Calvinism, pp. 22-23

ingly, Calvin's master in theology. Of course he does not take these ideas over from Bucer and repeat them by rote. They have become his own and issue afresh from him with a new exactness and delicacy of appreciation, in themselves and in their relations, with a new development of implications, and especially with a new richness of religious content."

But the man to whom Calvin was more indebted than to anyone else is Augustine. The system of theology which Calvin taught is certainly Augustinianism. The influence of this great church father over Calvin is indicated by the large number of times he quotes him. He quotes Augustine more than he does any other church father. In his Institutes alone Calvin quotes from Augustine 223 times, more times than all the Greek and Latin fathers combined, and quotes him nearly always with full approbation. In many places Calvin seems to prefer Augustine's words to his own. His agreement with Augustine has been expressed by Calvin himself in these words: "In a word, Augustine is so wholly with me, that if I wished to write a confession of my faith, I could do so, with all fulness and satisfaction to myself out of his writings."<sup>1</sup> "Nor is this manner of reasoning mine only, but, most certainly, Augustine's also."<sup>2</sup> Concerning Augustine's influence on Calvin, Tulloch says:<sup>3</sup> "An attentive study of the Insti-

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<sup>1</sup> Calvin's Calvinism, Part I. p. 20f.

<sup>2</sup> The Secret Providence of God, p. 61

<sup>3</sup> Leaders of the Reformation, pp. 254, 255

tutes reveals the presence of Augustine everywhere; and great as Calvin, beyond doubt, is in exegesis, his exegesis is mainly controlled by Augustinian dogmatic theory ...Calvin is not merely indebted to Augustine, but he verbally reproduces him at great length; and it is a favourite plan with him, when hard pushed by the dilemmas which his own acuteness or the representations of opponents suggest, to retreat behind the arguments of his great prototype, and to suppose himself strong within the cover of assertions not less startling and inadmissible, though more venerable than his own."

Nevertheless, we must not infer that Calvin slavishly followed Augustine. He was no theological parrot. Calvin was an intellectual and spiritual genius in his own right. On occasions he does not hesitate to disagree with his great master frankly and sometimes sharply. Such disagreements, to be sure, are infrequent and exceptional, but when they do occur Calvin is always most positive in asserting his own position.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps one reason why Calvin emphasized so strongly the ethical aspect of holiness was because there was an atmosphere of strict morality in his own home. Dr. Jules Bonnet, the collector of Calvin's letters, has said that

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<sup>1</sup> See Defence of the Secret Providence of God, p. 13, passage beginning, "But I will not say with Augustine..."



Gerard Chauvin, the reformer's father, was "a man of strict morals."<sup>1</sup> One is not surprised therefore, to note that from his youth Calvin was a man of elevated ethical temper and of solemn piety. Theodore Beza says in his *Life of John Calvin* that even in "his tender years he was in a surprising manner devoted to religion, and a stern reprover of all the vices of his companions." Undoubtedly it was his uncompromising and sometimes censorious bearing among his associates which earned for him the nickname of "The Accusative Case." Concerning Calvin's character as a youth Dr. Warfield says:<sup>2</sup> "But serious-minded he undoubtedly was, dominated by a scrupulous piety, and schooled in a strict morality which brooked with difficulty immorality in his associates."

But the one influence which, above all others, determined Calvin's view of God was his unqualified allegiance to the Bible. As we shall see later on in this chapter, his own dominant desire in all his preaching, teaching and writing was to set forth "what is plainly and unambiguously taught in Scripture."<sup>3</sup> Calvin followed Bucer and Augustine because he was convinced that these thinkers had stated the Scriptural doctrine of God, and not merely because he considered them able theologians.

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<sup>1</sup> Calvins Letters, Vol. I, p. 2 (footnote)

<sup>2</sup> Calvin and Calvinism, p. 3

<sup>3</sup> Institutes, I, i, p. 272

And now, let us consider some of the influences which gave form to Professor Otto's views. One cannot read his books without being impressed with the degree in which he reveals his indebtedness to four great German philosophers: Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Jakob Fries, and W. DeWette. Professor Otto might properly be called a "neo-Kantian". In his chapter on "The Holy as an A Priori Category" in his The Idea of the Holy he quotes with approval the opening words of Kant's Critique of Pure Reason: "That all our knowledge begins with experience there can be no doubt. For how is it possible that the faculty of cognition should be awakened into exercise otherwise than by means of objects which affect our senses?...But, though all our knowledge begins with experience, it by no means follows that all arises out of experience."<sup>1</sup> Otto further reveals his indebtedness to Kant when he says that "in the numinous we have to deal with purely a priori cognitive elements."<sup>2</sup> But, as one can see by reading his The Philosophy of Religion, Otto bases himself primarily not upon Kant, but upon a disciple of Kant's, Jakob Fries. So interested was Otto in the Friesian philosophy that he and his associates were instrumental in organizing a neo-Friesian school. This group re-edited his works and also published a periodical disseminating his thought in Germany. Fries, as

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<sup>1</sup> The Idea of the Holy, pp. 116,117

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 117

Otto has pointed out,<sup>1</sup> did not follow too closely in his master's footsteps, but added to the Kantian philosophy "great extensions and improvements."

Professor Otto has without doubt been an enthusiastic student of Schleiermacher, which fact probably accounts for the clear contrast which he draws between rational and "profounder religion", as he calls it.<sup>2</sup> Otto evidently felt a strong attraction to the Romanticist theory of religion which held sway in the early part of the 19th century, of which Schleiermacher was a representative. It may have been, as Miss Marshall-Sandbach suggests,<sup>3</sup> the influence of this school which helped him to appreciate the unique quality of the religious emotion or feeling, and also which led him to distinguish between religion and morality. Schleiermacher was the greatest of all the romanticist theologians, and was the author of these startling words: "...religion resigns at once all claims on anything that belongs either to science or to morality." One hears in Otto's theory of religion a strong echo of those words.

But while it cannot be denied that Schleiermacher exercised a profound influence upon Professor Otto's thought, he is by no means Schleiermacher's shadow. That he parts company with Schleiermacher's philosophical and theologi-

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<sup>1</sup> The Philosophy of Religion, p. 20

<sup>2</sup> The Idea of the Holy, p. 3

<sup>3</sup> Church Quarterly Review, Vol. cvii, p. 43

cal position is clearly shown in his treatment of 'creature-feeling' and 'divination'.

Professor Otto's position has been coloured in no small degree by his study of Mysticism, both East and West. This mystical influence was due in part to Otto's native mystical temperament, and in part to his extensive travels in the Orient, particularly in India. On this point H. Malldwyn Hughes says:<sup>1</sup> "To some extent, Otto's theological ancestry is the same as that of Dionysius the Areopagite. As the latter derived some of his ideas from Indian sources through Neo-Platonism, so too does Otto through a first-hand acquaintance with Indian religious speculation." And Miss Marshall-Sandbach says concerning the influence upon Professor Otto of Indian religious speculation:<sup>2</sup> "A visit to India, when Otto as a great Sanskrit scholar, studied Hinduism and Buddhism at first hand, very probably accentuated characteristics which were already germinating. Professor Heiler, in an interesting article has suggested that this visit gave Otto the necessary stimulus for his future work. He also points out that the sense of mystery which pervades Buddhist and Hindu temples would be one to which Otto would be peculiarly sensitive. It can well be conceived that he may have been influenced by the very crude, but none

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<sup>1</sup> The Christian Idea of God, p. 65

<sup>2</sup> Church Quarterly Review, Vol. cvii, p. 43



the less awe-inspiring, attempts to portray in wood and stone that numinous quality which he admits having already sensed in the writings of Luther. Anyone who is familiar with the picture of Durga which he has chosen to adorn the pages of the German editions of Das Heilige will realize the type of emotion which such figures were intended to express and to inspire. Certainly his visit to India has borne fruit. Not only has he translated several volumes of Indian philosophy into German but also his two books Das Heilige and West-Ostliche Mystik bear witness of the close and careful study which he has given to the writings of Sankara, the prince of Indian mystics."

Professor Otto would probably have disliked being called a mystic, but he does certainly follow the mystical approach to religion. One cannot easily forget this sentence from his The Idea of the Holy:<sup>1</sup> "Essentially mysticism is the stressing to a very high degree, indeed the overstressing, of the non-rational or supra-rational elements in religion." Otto refers again and again<sup>in</sup> his Das Heilige to the mystical elements in Buddhism and Hinduism, and shows how certain of his own ideas resemble these.

We must not pass without noting the influence which Martin Luther's writings exerted on Otto. Speaking of his use of the terms 'maiestas' and 'tremendum', he says:<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> p. 22

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 103



"And the reason I introduced these terms above to denote the one side of the numinous experience was in fact just because I recalled Luther's own expressions, and borrowed them from his 'divina maiestas' and 'metuenda voluntas', which have rung in my ears from the time of my earliest study of Luther. Indeed I grew to understand the numinous and its difference from the rational in Luther's De Servo Arbitrio long before I identified it in the 'qadosh' of the Old Testament and in the elements of 'religious awe' in the history of religion in general."

#### Methods of Approach

Calvin and Otto differ in their methods of approach in treating of the nature of God. Calvin's approach is definitely the Scriptural approach. He was a Biblical theologian in the strictest sense, and, beyond all question, the greatest exegete of his century. Tulloch says of him:<sup>1</sup> "Calvin everywhere appealed to Scripture, -- he is the greatest Biblical commentator, as he is the greatest Biblical dogmatist, of his age." And Henry F. Henderson says:<sup>2</sup> "As an expounder of Scripture, whether we have regard to the quality or the quantity of his work, Calvin must be pronounced the master exegete of the Reformation period." It would be indeed difficult for one to overstress the emphasis which Calvin put upon the Holy

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<sup>1</sup> Leaders of the Reformation, p. 254

<sup>2</sup> Calvin in His Letters, p. 50

Scriptures. He considered the Bible the one great source of religious knowledge, and it is hardly an exaggeration to say that he devoted his entire life to the exposition of it. He arrived at his doctrinal conclusions through Scripture exegesis and exposition. The Bible was his chief source book and final authority. It was his contention that God has given men a sufficient revelation of Himself in His Word. This disclosure is true and adequate and final. We find in the pages of the Old and New Testaments all we need to know about God, His character and His will. If men wish to learn about God, let them turn to the supreme revelation of Himself, the Bible: "If true religion is to beam upon us, our principle must be, that it is necessary to begin with heavenly teaching, and that it is impossible for any man to obtain even the minutest portion of right and sound doctrine without being a disciple of Scripture. Hence, the first step in true knowledge is taken, when we reverently embrace the testimony which God has been pleased therein to give of himself."<sup>1</sup> "...the Scripture, collecting in our minds the otherwise confused notions of deity, dispels the darkness and gives us a clear view of the true God."<sup>2</sup> Calvin buttresses his statements with abundant references from Scripture, and considers that when he has done that he has brought forward all the evidence necessary

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<sup>1</sup> Institutes, I, i, p. 86

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 84

to substantiate his own views. And he steadily refuses to go beyond "what is written."

It should be said though, that Calvin never went to the Scriptures with a view to finding support for any pre-conceived ideas. The views which he expressed grew out of his judicious and penetrating exposition of the inspired text. Rev. John King says on this point: "No writer ever dealt more fairly and honestly by the Word of God. He is scrupulously careful to let it speak for itself, and to guard against every tendency of his own mind to put upon it a questionable meaning for the sake of establishing some doctrine which he feels to be important, or some theory which he is anxious to uphold." And Dunlop Moore, in an article on Calvin's Doctrine of Holy Scripture, states that "Nothing could be more erroneous than the prevalent idea that Calvin was a daring speculator in theology, who searched the Scriptures for materials to support a theory which he had arrived at by the coercion of 'remorseless logic.' Never was a man more submissive to what he believed to be divine revelation."<sup>2</sup>

Calvin was interested in the feelings and emotions of men only as corroborations or illustrations of Biblical truth. His approach is therefore objective in character. He was less concerned with the psychological nature and

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<sup>1</sup> Translator's Preface

<sup>2</sup> Presbyterian and Reformed Review, Vol. iv, p. 49

relations of the religious emotions that surge through the human soul than he was with the Divine Source from which they spring, the Divine Object upon which they lay hold, and by Which they are evoked. Calvin refused to speculate on what God is apart from what has been clearly set forth in the Bible. "His was a theological not a metaphysical mind."<sup>1</sup> He rejected all a priori methods of determining the nature of God, and requires that men form their knowledge of Him a posteriori from the direct revelations He gives of Himself in His Word and works. On this point Dr. Warfield says:<sup>2</sup> "His theological method was persistently, rigorously, some may even say exaggeratedly, a posteriori...His instrument of research was not logical amplification, but exegetical investigation... Whither the Bible took him, thither he went: where the Scriptural declarations failed him, there he stopped short."

Professor Otto's approach to the nature of God is altogether different from that of Calvin. He does not at all disregard the testimony of Scripture, but he uses the Bible primarily for purposes of illustration along with other sources. As his translator, Dr. John W. Harvey, has observed:<sup>3</sup> "He has 'ransacked the ages, spoiled the climes'. The remote Mosaic and pre-Mosaic religion of Israel, the Hebrew prophets, and modern Judaism; the relig-

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<sup>1</sup> Harkness, "John Calvin: The Man & His Ethics," p. 114

<sup>2</sup> Pamphlet, "Calvin as a Theologian and Calvinism Today, p. 6

<sup>3</sup> Trans. Preface, "The Idea of the Holy," p. xiv.



ions of Greece and Rome and Islam, of China and of India; the New Testament, the Fathers, the medieval mystics, the reformers, and modern Protestantism; the author calls them all as witnesses." Now Professor Otto finds in the religions of Greece, Rome, Persia, India, China, etc., illustrations which are quite as valid for his purpose as those in the Old and New Testaments. He is concerned primarily not with the Bible doctrine of holiness as such, but with the 'numinous' as a universal element present in all religions and in all types of religious experience. To quote again from Dr. Harvey:<sup>1</sup> "His argument, while laying due stress on the essential differences between religions, emphasizes and establishes their no less fundamental kinship on the side of feeling."

Professor Otto approaches the doctrine of holiness more as a philosopher of religion and a psychologist than as a Biblical theologian. Otto appeals to reason rather than revelation, and he grounds religion in human nature itself. He arrives at his conclusions not primarily through Scripture exegesis, but through the detailed examination and analysis of 'emotions' and 'feelings' in human experience - through the "probing and analysis" of the states of the soul. He takes the material which he finds there and from it constructs his doctrine of 'the holy'. The ability at discriminating introspection is

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<sup>1</sup> Trans. Preface, "The Idea of the Holy," p. xiv



an invaluable aid in arriving at a knowledge of Divine holiness, an ability which Professor Otto Himself possessed in high degree. "The reader is invited to direct his mind to a moment of deeply-felt religious experience, as little as possible qualified by other forms of consciousness. Whoever cannot do this, whoever knows no such moments in his experience is requested to read no further."<sup>1</sup> If Calvin's method is objective, Otto's is certainly subjective.

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<sup>1</sup> The Idea of the Holy, p. 8

### Chapter XIII.

#### CRITICISM AND CONCLUSION

A comparison of the views of God's holiness held by John Calvin and Rudolf Otto will reveal many points of similarity. Each of these men lays heavy stress on the element of 'divinity' or 'sacredness' in the idea of Divine Holiness. It is clear that in his doctrine of the 'majesty' of God Calvin is calling attention to the same quality in holiness which Professor Otto singles out and denominates the 'numinous'. In Calvin's idea of 'majesty' or 'glory' there are present the features of holiness included in Professor Otto's mysterium tremendum et fascinans, though not in a form as exaggerated. For example, one discovers in the following sentence from Calvin the idea of 'mystery' which Otto states produces in the worshipping creature a kind of 'amazement' or 'stupor': "The brightness of his glory is such, that the sight of Him, as He is by our naked vision, would absorb and overwhelm all our senses, in a moment."<sup>1</sup> Calvin would agree with Otto in his contention that there is in God's holiness "a Mystery inexpressible and above all creatures;"<sup>2</sup> that there is that in God's nature which defies conceptualization and overwhelms pure reason. The 'majesty' or 'glory' of God is, according to Calvin, 'inconceivable',

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<sup>1</sup> Secret Providence of God, p. 34

<sup>2</sup> The Idea of the Holy, p. 13

'incomprehensible', 'overwhelming'. It is an "unspeakably bright and glorious majesty which lays prostrate all our faculties."<sup>1</sup> It is a majesty which cannot be comprehended nor expressed; it is a 'glory' which transcends "the dearth of human words, the roughness of mortal speech."

The fearful, awe-inspiring character of this 'mystery' which Professor Otto denotes by the adjective, 'tremendum', is also present with real force in Calvin's doctrine. He speaks of the 'majesty' of Jehovah as 'immense' and 'terrible' and 'unapproachable', in the presence of which all men 'fear'. With the wicked men, the 'reprobates', this response of 'fear' takes the form of untempered terror; they are 'horror-struck'. With the believer however, this 'fear' takes the form of "a voluntary fear flowing from reverence of the divine majesty."<sup>2</sup> While Professor Otto says that the English word 'awe' best describes<sup>the</sup> emotion evoked by the 'tremendum', Calvin seems to prefer the word 'reverence'. With him it is either real 'terror' or 'reverence', with 'awe' present as a phase in each. The wicked and the godly both are awed, but more than that, the wicked is terrorized and the godly made reverent. Otto contends that 'reverence' as generally understood is hardly a sufficient designation of an emotion which is so absolutely non-rational and non-moral. Calvin would

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah I, p. 204

<sup>2</sup> Inst. I, i, p. 62

probably answer that 'awe' is inadequate because it is not sufficiently rational and moral; because it is not positive enough - too vague and empty.

Calvin makes much, as does Otto, of creature-consciousness, though more indirectly. Calvin does not separate creature-consciousness as sharply from sin-consciousness, but the idea of creature-feeling does appear again and again in his treatment of the effect which an awareness of the holiness of God produces in men. As we have pointed out elsewhere, to Calvin God is God, and man is man. A great chasm exists between a holy God and man, not only because of man's moral wrong-doing, but also because of his creatureliness. All who come into any real contact with God's Majesty sharply feel their own insignificance and unworthiness. "All majesty is comprehended in God alone;"<sup>1</sup> men are merely 'creatures', they are 'flesh'. The godly feel their creaturehood more than the ungodly. The ungodly have a way of impiously exalting themselves so that they feel no abasement or humility in the presence of God. The believers, on the other hand, feel 'over-awed', 'reduced to silence', 'humbled'; they are conscious of their 'feebleness' as well as their 'pollution'.

In Calvin's doctrine of the holiness of God we find

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<sup>1</sup> Psalms IV, p. 67

the attractive aspect of Divine holiness recognized. That which Professor Otto designates 'fascinans' is not lost sight of in Calvin's view, though it must be said that he does not make as much of this phase of holiness as does Otto. Calvin explains that people should not only "be alarmed by the majesty of God, but also that they should be gently attracted."<sup>1</sup> He holds that only those who turn to God in submission and saving faith, only believers, can experience the attractiveness of holiness in its profoundest sense. All wicked and ungodly men find in God's 'majesty' only just cause for 'mere terror'. Believers can 'fear' God, and at the same time be free from despondency. They may in the presence of God's holiness have 'confidence' and possess 'secure consolation'.

We believe that in Calvin's total conception of Divine holiness as 'majesty' plus 'righteousness', he has correctly set forth the Bible doctrine of the holiness of God. And we find ourselves in perfect agreement with his general view. Because he stays close to the Scriptural understanding of holiness his doctrine is well-balanced and includes all the essential elements. Each element receives from Calvin its proper emphasis. Calvin thus avoids the mistake of a one-sided interpretation of Di-

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<sup>1</sup> Harmony of Pentateuch I, p. 339 (Italics mine)



vine holiness, a mistake which we feel Professor Otto makes. He emphasizes sufficiently that aspect of holiness which so completely engrosses the attention of Otto. He does not let us forget that God's holiness is something more than simply His ethical perfection. By his doctrine of Divine 'majesty' or 'glory' Calvin has brought into relief the "otherness" of God, and reminded us that in His holiness God is not only purer than man but that He is qualitatively distinct from him. He has compelled us to face the fact that Divine holiness is much more than a name for God's ethical character, His goodness. Calvin's view is deeply ethical, but never merely ethical. The criticism therefore, which Professor Otto makes of some more modern thinkers, that they make holiness a synonym for God's moral perfection, cannot be made of Calvin.

But while Calvin stresses the 'sacred' element in holiness, he does not fail to take into account the ethical aspect as an equally constitutive element in God's holiness. He knows nothing of any real holiness apart from its rational and moral qualities. We believe that Calvin would deny that the moral aspect of God's holiness is any mere accretion, something externally added later on and not belonging to holiness per se. In his view the ethical element is given its rightful place, and because of this fact he has sufficiently related God's holiness

to both reason and conscience. We believe that Calvin has really achieved what Otto meant to achieve and failed, viz. the "preserving for Christianity its mystical depth ...without letting it develop into a mere rank growth of mysticity."<sup>1</sup>

That Professor Otto has made a valuable contribution to man's thinking on the subject of the holiness of God is hardly open to question. His painstaking and elaborate treatment of 'the Holy' is both brilliant and original, and has immeasurably enriched our conception of God. His treatment has served, and will serve to counteract the one-sidedly intellectualistic conception of religion which is in vogue in some circles of thought today. Professor Otto's treatment is a fine antidote for the modern tendency to consider religion and morality as one and the same thing, and to think of the Moral Ideal as only another name for God.

We have to thank Professor Otto for the skilful way in which he has singled out the more-than-rational element in holiness and given it prominence. If the Bible is any guide, there is a quality in Divine holiness which eludes our conceptual thinking, and which is something other than bare goodness. It must be pointed out however, that Professor Otto is by no means the first to

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<sup>1</sup> The Idea of the Holy, p. 146

recognize and accent this quality in holiness. As we have already observed, John Calvin made much of it, and such Old Testament scholars as Robertson Smith, A. B. Davidson, and George Adam Smith have been intimately familiar with the truth which Professor Otto stresses. They have known all along that kadosh stands for something more and other than mere goodness. For example, A. B. Davidson, commenting on the trisagion in Isaiah vi., says: "That cry of 'Holy' does not ascribe any attribute to God. It is something far larger than the quality of moral purity, for it is added, 'the whole earth is full of His glory.' The word 'Holy' is the highest name for God. It describes His transcendent majesty, His absolute Godhead. What these beings express, taking up each other's cry, is that He, who is before them on the throne, is God, in the sense than which nothing can be higher. In our language, their cry would be: 'God, God, God! the whole earth is filled with His glory!' It is not any quality in Him that they realized, and that we need to realize. What they felt was that they were near the majestic, unutterable Person Himself."<sup>1</sup>

But while Professor Otto was not the first to discover the element of mystery and of the supra-rational in religion, he has given it a fresh emphasis. Such an

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<sup>1</sup> The Called of God, p. 192. Cf. G. A. Smith, The Book of Isaiah, Vol. I, pp. 63-65

emphasis was needed, for the great majority of people had come to think and speak and write of holiness only in terms of moral perfection and purity. The indefinable and inexpressible element was almost if not entirely lost sight of. Professor Otto has made us see anew that such an exclusively moral view of holiness is untenable; that there is that quality in God's holiness which cannot be described by ethical concepts, and which transcends reason in the narrow sense. He has helped us to see more clearly than ever that religion is not just "transfigured morality" or "morality tinged with emotion." In so doing, Professor Otto has rendered a valuable service to modern theological thinking. As Bertrand R. Brannett has put it:<sup>1</sup> "It may, perhaps, be a little fanciful to find evidence of God's holiness in the cold light of stars tremendously remote or in the ever-virgin snows of untrodden mountain tops, but at least it is well always to remember that the divine holiness is something more than simply ethical."

But while we are glad to acknowledge our indebtedness to Professor Otto for emphasizing so strikingly the numinous element in holiness, we believe that he does not discriminate sufficiently between 'awe' in general and religious awe. It is true that the sense of the numinous

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<sup>1</sup> God the Worshipful, p. 124

is often a sense of God's holiness, but not always. The mysterium tremendum is by no means confined to a sense of 'the Holy'. A feeling of 'awe' or 'dread' may be inspired by forms of experience which are not only not specifically religious, but something else altogether. As Dr. John Oman has observed,<sup>1</sup> any environment sufficiently great and strange may evoke it. One may experience this 'numinous dread' when surrounded by the beauties, the grandeur, the powers, and the mysteries of nature. Here one does certainly come in contact with mystery which is both fearful and alluring. Concerning the presence of the mysterium tremendum et fascinans in the natural world, Dr. Oman has this fine paragraph:<sup>2</sup> "Why is he (man) so forcibly drawn by forbidding regions like the Arctic Circle or the Sahara? Is it not because there is mystery in the vast naked spaces, and because he is fascinated by feeling himself so small as he is shaken by awe, overshadowed by majesty and reduced to nothing before the resistless energy of the power of nature, yet feels himself so great as he dares to face them? Even if our author (Otto) knows it from another source, is he not finding readers who know it from a raid in No Man's Land in the peril and mystery of the dark?"

We simply cannot regard the mysterious and 'the Holy' as synonymous or identical. A thing may have the quality

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<sup>1</sup> The Natural and the Supernatural, p. 60

<sup>2</sup> Article, Journal of Religious Studies, xxv. pp. 283, 284



of mystery without being distinctly religious. We experienced the feeling of 'awe' which Otto describes when on a trip through the Canadian Rockies, and also when following a guide through the dark labyrinthine passages of Mammoth Cave in Kentucky. The resulting emotion was close akin to 'shuddering dread', but we simply cannot think of it as a distinctly religious emotion, or as a response to God's holiness. Of the beautiful Magnolia Gardens near Charleston, South Carolina, John Galsworthy has said:<sup>1</sup> "Nothing so lovely and wistful, nothing so richly colored, yet so ghostlike, exists, planted by the sons of men. Beyond anything I have ever seen, it is other-worldly." But is one to contend that the thing which Mr. Galsworthy experienced was Divine holiness? Hardly. It does seem to us that Professor Otto has not sufficiently distinguished the 'spooky' from the 'sacred'.

It is highly significant that the emotions of 'fear' and 'dread' are not confined to man, but are experienced by animals as well. They too, seem to have a sense of the 'numinous'. Indeed, Professor Otto himself calls attention to this.<sup>2</sup> He suggests that the "disgust and startled fright" which animals experience when recognizing a corpse are illustrations of a sense of the numinous in its crudest manifestations. "I observed this," he says,

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in an anonymous leaflet advertising the gardens.

<sup>2</sup> The Idea of the Holy, p. 123

"in a very pronounced degree on one occasion, when, upon a lonely ride, we suddenly came upon the body of a dead horse, and Diana, my excellent mount, on recognizing her dead fellow, gave every indication of the most natural fright and disgust." Now the question is this: Is Otto right in identifying this feeling-response in higher animals with the religious response? Is it fair to say that the "startled fright" which a horse experiences in the presence of the uncanny is, in any true sense at all, an unripe response to 'the Holy' and therefore essentially religious? We cannot think so. On this point Dr. John Oman has the following excellent paragraph:<sup>1</sup>

"Prof. Otto tells a story of his horse, but I have one of mine much more relevant. When a boy of fourteen or thereabouts, I was riding through the Standing Stones of Stenness on a winter afternoon when dusk was settling into darkness. They stand on the top of a lone narrow neck of land between two lochs. The close-cropped heather crackled under my horse's feet, the loch on the right was still shining under the glow of sunset and the loch on the left was dark almost to blackness, and across a bay the grave-stones in the churchyard stood white and clear over it. The circle of stones had a look of ancient giants against the grey sky, and the gaping mounds which had been opened stood shadowy and apart. A more numinous scene, at a more

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<sup>1</sup> Article, *Journal of Religious Studies*, xxv., pp. 282, 283

numinous hour, could not be found on earth. And the feeling which suddenly struck me is not inaptly described as the mysterium tremendum et fascinans. But at the same moment it struck my old horse at least as vehemently as myself. He threw up his head, snorted, set his feet, trembled, and finally bolted at a rate I should have thought impossible for his old bones. Now there is little doubt that Prof. Otto is right in finding the reason why the early Briton erected this circle of stones on that particular spot in the peculiar eerie feeling it created rather than in merely intellectual ideas; but, as the feeling had probably not yet arrived at being religious for my horse and had ceased to be religious for me, it would be necessary to ask, what was the peculiarity which, without disrespect to his intelligence, I may assume my horse not to have attained and which, without excessive pride in my state of civilization, I may assume I had passed beyond, which made it for primitive man religious? In spite of the mechanical ideas imposed upon me by a scientific age, I persist in thinking that the feelings aroused by nature which gave rise to animism have more to say for themselves than the people whose acquaintance with nature is chiefly in laboratories and tourist resorts admit; and it is easier to have a religious sense of a living world than of a dead one. But are these feelings in themselves religious? They may stir and pass over into the holy, to

use Prof. Otto's own correct description, but are we not then in a new order? And is not the essence of it that it is an order of absolute value which, when it escapes from its material form, is just the ethical sacred, the sense of the requirements of a Spirit in the world which is absolute and of a spirit in ourselves in its image which has its worth in accepting as its own these absolute requirements and refusing to bring them down to the level of our temporal convenience? It may only appear in an irrational material taboo, but, if man has said, 'This is sacred, and I would rather die than disregard it', he is not only religious, but, by his religion, he has won a footing amid the sands of changing impulse and association. My horse, we may assume, had not reached this valuation, and I was at least learning to make it by less material ways."

Again, we find ourselves in disagreement with Prof. Otto's contention that the most fundamental and characteristic element in holiness is strictly non-ethical. We are ready to grant that God's holiness is not morality pure and simple, but Prof. Otto's treatment is, to say the least, one-sided, and so one-sided as to be dangerous. If we follow Prof. Otto's theory through to its logical conclusion religion becomes sheer unethical mystery. There is far more in Divine holiness than his 'numinous' can express or even suggest. True religion has to do with

morality, deeply and all the time. As Prof. Mackintosh has put it,<sup>1</sup> "While religion is not morality, and every attempt to reduce it to purely moral terms must fail, it is never apart from morality, and the higher a faith is the more completely do these two sides of experience merge in each other." "God, for the Christian mind, is more than the moral law alive, but we cannot conceive of Him at all except as subsisting in a moral universe, and acting under moral conditions."

Of course we do not mean to imply that Prof. Otto does not believe in the moral character of developed holiness. He does; but in his theory the ethical element is not a fundamental and characteristic element in holiness. The moral only schematises or enriches the numinous, and therefore the connection between holiness and goodness is of a "secondary and subsidiary" kind. In Otto's view the moral is certainly subordinated and subsequent to the supra-rational, and is in reality little more than a refinement of the numinous. It is perilous, it seems to us, for all practical religious faith and life to give the impression, as Prof. Otto's theory is certain to give to some minds, that religion is differentiable from morality and historically prior to it; that the rational and moral qualities were added later and only in a "secondary and subsidiary" sense. According to Otto the moral factor does

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<sup>1</sup> The Christian Experience of Forgiveness, pp. 157, 158



not belong either natively or directly to the nature of religion. And to him holiness is basically such a purely religious concept that morality can be subtracted from it without in any vital way damaging its real essence.

This certainly is not the idea of holiness presented to us in the Bible. In the Bible "the religious is always the ethical and the ethical always the religious, so that the one is never a schematization of the other."<sup>1</sup> Prof. Otto contends that in Isaiah's statement, "I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell among a people of unclean lips," and also the statement of Peter, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord," are not "moral depreciations, but belong to a quite special category of valuation and appraisal."<sup>2</sup> He goes on to say that the feeling expressed in these two statements "is beyond question not that of the transgression of the moral law, however evident it may be that such a transgression, where it has occurred, will involve it as a consequence: it is the feeling of absolute 'profaneness'." But it is difficult for us to see how Prof. Otto could so interpret these passages. Everything in the context and in the statements themselves indicates that what Isaiah and Peter experienced was not simply a feeling of creature weakness, but also quite specifically the feeling of moral sinfulness and impurity. We believe that Peter recognized in Jesus

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<sup>1</sup> Oman, Journal of Theol. Studies, xxv., p. 285

<sup>2</sup> The Idea of the Holy, p. 53

a quality of sinlessness as well as a numinous quality. Else why did he speak of himself as ἁμαρτωλός? The experience of creature-feeling is undoubtedly present in the confessions of both Isaiah and Peter, but to as great an extent, if not greater, there is present the consciousness of having set themselves against the righteous will of God. We further believe that each of these elements was present in the experience from the start. Neither is prior to the other, but each is a fundamental and characteristic element.

We do not believe that Prof. Otto's theory of holiness as basically non-ethical is substantiated by religious experience. We cannot think that any true religious response is possible outside of and apart from the moral. It simply does not work out that way in religious experience, and it does seem that with his acute psychological mind Professor Otto would have seen this more clearly. He does seem to see it when he says that the recognition of 'the holy' as numinous and moral at the same time is "axiomatic" and "self-evident", but his entire theory is against this being true. If the recognition of 'the holy' as numinous and moral at the same time is 'axiomatic' and 'self-evident', how does he contend that the rational element is less original than the non-rational?

Men seem to know instinctively that when they bow before the awe-inspiring holiness of God in self-abasement

they are bowing before One Whose moral challenge they must accept. One cannot come into the presence of the Holy at all without feeling sharply the sense of "oughtness". If we fully analyze the religious consciousness we will find that there is within man an inner intuitive conviction that the numinous and the moral belong together, and that they have always been together in an indivisible coalition. The numinous Object inspires moral reverence as well as mysterious awe. Indeed, the very fact that man's understanding of God's holiness became of necessity moralized is testimony of the indivisible unity of the numinous and the moral in human experience. God's holiness is ever the same; it is only man's understanding of it which develops.

In the simplest and most primitive forms of religion the moral quality is never wholly absent. In the earliest religions one meets the sense of 'oughtness' or 'obligation' resulting from an awareness of the 'divine'. D. M. Baillie has reminded us that "most authorities would now agree that some kind of morality worthy of the name exists in every human tribe, and sometimes a surprisingly high kind in very primitive tribes." "Whatever religion the savage has is closely connected with whatever morality he has -- such is the deeper and more understanding view at which the science~~d~~ of religion has now arrived."<sup>1</sup> And

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<sup>1</sup> Faith in God & Its Christian Consummation, pp. 194,195

Robertson Smith says that "even in its rudest forms religion was a moral force."<sup>1</sup> He further states:<sup>2</sup> "In ancient society, the religious ideal expressed in the act of social worship and the ethical ideal which governed the conduct of daily life were wholly at one, and all morality -- as morality was then understood -- was consecrated and enforced by religious motives and sanctions."

According to Professor Otto's theory, it is difficult to see how there can be any real union between the non-rational and the moral in the idea of holiness. His isolation of the numinous has had a result which he himself did not intend that it should. It was his purpose to isolate the numinous element only for purposes of discussion, but what has happened is that he has made holiness essentially non-rational and non-ethical. Whether he meant to do so or not, he has pressed his separation of the non-ethical and the ethical until he has created a veritable breach in the religious consciousness, and a division in holiness itself. Prof. Otto meant to contend that there are two salient elements present in holiness, but what he has actually said is that fundamentally 'the holy' is the numen, and therefore primarily and essentially non-moral in character. God's moral and rational side was developing all along, but developing separately

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<sup>1</sup> The Religion of the Semites, p. 53

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 267

And Dr. John Oman says: "When we look back on this evolution of the sense of the holy, it is not difficult to discover, in every stage known to us, the germ at least of the moral developments." (Natural & Supernatural, p. 63)

from the numinous and not any real intrinsic part of holiness at all. Gradually somewhere in the religious development of the race the two come together. It is difficult to escape the conviction that in Otto's treatment the moral is only an appendage to holiness and not a real part of its essential nature. His insistence that the numinous must always, even after it is schematized, be thought of as the essential and basic element in holiness makes the moral nothing more than a mere accretion, a something-thrown-in at the invitation of the numinous to satisfy a whim rather than a felt need. We cannot get away from the feeling that the moral in Prof. Otto's view is insufficiently welded to the numinous.

Prof. Otto did not mean that his treatment should have this result. He isolated the numinous merely, as he stated in the early pages of Das Heilige, in order that we might more thoroughly examine it, and "to keep the meaning clearly apart and distinct." But he has been too successful in his isolation policy. His theory does more than assert the rights of the more-than-moral element; it causes it to secede from the union. Prof. Otto's first intention was simply to break up holiness into its component parts in order to emphasize the numinous quality. He did not mean to create a real and permanent division. But a close reading of his argument will show that that is precisely what has happened. As Prof. Mack-



intosh has stated it:<sup>1</sup> "Otto manifestly intends to hold the balance evenly between the rational and ethical elements on the one hand and the non-rational on the other, so that in the final development what is religious is always ethical, and what is ethical is always religious. Yet passages occur (more frequently perhaps in his later book of essays, Aufsätze das Numinose betreffend) which apparently teach that something wholly non-moral in type is the deepest thing in all religion, even the highest." Prof. Otto starts out speaking of the numinous as a mere 'over-plus' of meaning in association with rational elements. But as he goes along he becomes so enamored of his numinous idea that it completely "steals the show," and fills the whole horizon until the non-rational and the rational are hopelessly alienated. Prof. Otto is convinced, as the history of religion clearly reveals, that there is a real and essential relation between the non-moral and the moral, but he has separated them not only in analysis, but in fact, and is hard put to it to get them together again. His analysis of religious experience left him with the numinous and the ethical developing along parallel lines with no organic relationship controlling their evolution.

Having separated two elements which are always indistinguishable in the religious consciousness, Prof. Otto

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<sup>1</sup> Selections from the Literature of Theism, p. 457  
(footnote)

tries desperately during the latter half of his book, Das Heilige, to bring them together again. But such has been his argument that he finds himself in somewhat the same predicament as Humpty-Dumpty. He has created a rift in holiness which he finds difficult to patch up. In an effort to do so he resorts to a most ingenious yet unfruitful device. Having distinguished sharply between the non-rational and the rational in the interests of his theory, he later holds that in the interest of experience and common sense the two are related a priori. We are told that not only are the non-moral and the moral categories a priori in themselves, but the same a priori character extends to the connection or conjunction between the two. We are 'forced', says Prof. Otto, to assume a third a priori principle because the relation or connection between the non-moral and the moral is "felt as something axiomatic, something whose inner necessity we feel to be self-evident."<sup>1</sup> But how two categories each a priori in character and developing entirely independent of each other can be brought together through a conjunction that is also a priori is most difficult for us to understand. We cannot see how two things having no essential, fundamental kinship can be brought together in any real union even by the method which Prof. Otto suggests.

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<sup>1</sup> The Idea of the Holy, p. 140

If the numinous has nothing to do with morality at the outset no verbal sleight of hand can bring it into any living relation with the moral consciousness. Prof. Otto has distinguished so sharply between the "awe-inspiring holiness" of God and the "morally challenging holiness" of God, that when he does attempt to bring them together he effects not a real organic union, but what resembles a loose federation.

It is quite evident that in completely separating the moral and the non-moral Prof. Otto has attempted what is really an impossibility. He finds, as all must ultimately find, that the constituent elements which God has joined together no man can put asunder. The non-moral simply cannot be kept out of "entangling alliances" with the moral. Unless there is morality in holiness from the start it is useless to try to introduce it at a later stage in religious evolution. We take our stand with Prof. Miall Edwards in affirming that the rationalization and moralization of the numinous "is the result not of the infusion into religion of values which are of independent origin, but of the immanent development of the supreme religious value (the Holy) itself."<sup>1</sup>

Prof. Otto says that the union of the rational and the moral with the non-rational and the non-moral is "the

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<sup>1</sup> Hibbert Journal, April 1930

most surprising of all the facts in the history of religion."<sup>1</sup> That such could happen according to Prof. Otto's theory is surprising, but it is not surprising at all to those who believe that these two elements have been in solution in holiness always. Surely if these two qualities are both a priori categories they must be on the same footing, and one cannot be subordinated by being made merely a schematization of the other. If the non-moral and the moral arise in complete independence, and only develop along parallel lines, they cannot be made one even by the introduction of a third a priori principle of conjunction. If they have any vital connection at all, it is no mechanical event taking place in time, but is a connection which is organic and eternal. In an effort to protect his numinous idea, and keep it from evaporating into the 'morally good', Prof. Otto has arrived at an extreme and exaggerated position which we find it impossible to accept.

Calvin's view of holiness seems to us much more satisfactory. He adequately recognizes and stresses the numinous element in his doctrine of the 'majesty' of God. He does not however, use the word 'majesty' or 'glory' to denote any purely non-rational, non-moral element. Nowhere does he imply that 'majesty' is strictly non-ethical.

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<sup>1</sup> The Idea of the Holy, p. 140

In his view the 'majesty' of God is awe-inspiring mystery, but it is mystery shot through with moral meaning. Calvin's doctrine is more satisfactory because he causes no gap to occur between 'majesty' and 'righteousness'. In his doctrine both of these elements in holiness are considered original and fundamental. The 'majesty' of God's holiness has an ethical content, and the 'righteousness' of God's holiness has an awe-inspiring quality. Calvin's fabric of Divine holiness therefore, is much stronger than the fabric of Otto, for in Calvin's the warp and the woof are of equal strength. Calvin bowed in humility and self-abasement before the incalculable God, but "the mystery before which Calvin bowed...is an ethical mystery."<sup>1</sup>

The relationship between religion and morality is vascular. If you part them, each is certain to bleed to death. "Pure religion and undefiled," to employ the language of the Apostle James,<sup>2</sup> is expressed not only in the emotions of 'awe' and 'creature-feeling', but also in, and never apart from, man's relation to the moral law. If we are going to have a conception of God's holiness which touches human life in any vital and transforming way, we must preserve its ethical character,<sup>3</sup> and the only way to preserve it is to recognize that holiness is ethi-

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<sup>1</sup> Brown, God At Work, p. 130. Footnote. (Italics mine)

<sup>2</sup> The Epistle of James, 1:27

<sup>3</sup> "There is continuing urgent need to fill in the word 'God' with ethical content to save it from becoming a holy blur." (Luccock, Christianity and the Individual, p. 74)



ical from the start. We agree with Bertrand R. Brasnett when he says that "for an instructed faith the holiness *of God* of God is profoundly ethical. It would be quite impossible for an adherent of a developed religion such as Christianity to worship a God whose holiness was defective in its moral quality...For the Christian theist goodness is an integral element in holiness, and it would be impossible for him to worship God as holy if he could not also at the same time worship him as good."<sup>1</sup>

Prof. Otto's theory, if accepted and followed through, is bound to have disastrous results for religion. One has only to review ecclesiastical history to see that when religion is in any practical sense divorced from morality and kept in a compartment of its own it becomes insipid, and people turn from it with disgust. But, on the other hand, when it is thought of as a relationship with a God Whose chief concern is with the characters of men, religion becomes virile and meaningful and deeply to be desired. Jesus was emphasizing the close kinship between religion and morality when he asked his admiring contemporaries: "And why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?"<sup>2</sup>

A fresh vision of the holiness of God as righteous majesty would give to Christian preaching a moral passion

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<sup>1</sup> God the Worshipful, p. 104

<sup>2</sup> Luke vi:46

capable of stirring the conscience. Prof. Otto's view would possibly enrich Protestant worship, but not to as great an extent our preaching. It tends too much toward a vague mysticism. Pushed to its logical conclusion his view would lead us to Schleiermacher's "exaggerated anti-thesis of Morality and Religion and to the exclusion of all moral topics from preaching."<sup>1</sup> John Calvin's zeal for personal and civic righteousness is greatly needed in our day, but we cannot have Calvin's zeal apart from his conception of the holy God. Present day preaching is lacking in the power which establishes righteousness in individual and corporate life. It needs more of the ethical flame of the prophets, but that will come only when the holiness of God is seen in its profound moral implications.

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<sup>1</sup> See Otto, *The Philosophy of Religion*, p. 158 (footnote)

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the less awe-inspiring, attempts to portray in wood and stone that numinous quality which he admits having already sensed in the writings of Luther. Anyone who is familiar with the picture of Durga which he has chosen to adorn the pages of the German editions of Das Heilige will realize the type of emotion which such figures were intended to express and to inspire. Certainly his visit to India has borne fruit. Not only has he translated several volumes of Indian philosophy into German but also his two books Das Heilige and West-Ostliche Mystik bear witness of the close and careful study which he has given to the writings of Sankara, the prince of Indian mystics."

Professor Otto would probably have disliked being called a mystic, but he does certainly follow the mystical approach to religion. One cannot easily forget this sentence from his The Idea of the Holy:<sup>1</sup> "Essentially mysticism is the stressing to a very high degree, indeed the overstressing, of the non-rational or supra-rational elements in religion." Otto refers again and again<sup>in</sup> his Das Heilige to the mystical elements in Buddhism and Hinduism, and shows how certain of his own ideas resemble these.

We must not pass without noting the influence which Martin Luther's writings exerted on Otto. Speaking of his use of the terms 'maiestas' and 'tremendum', he says:<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> p. 22

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 103